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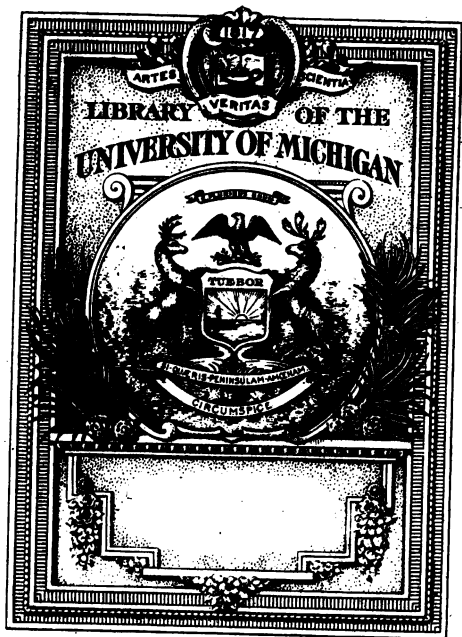
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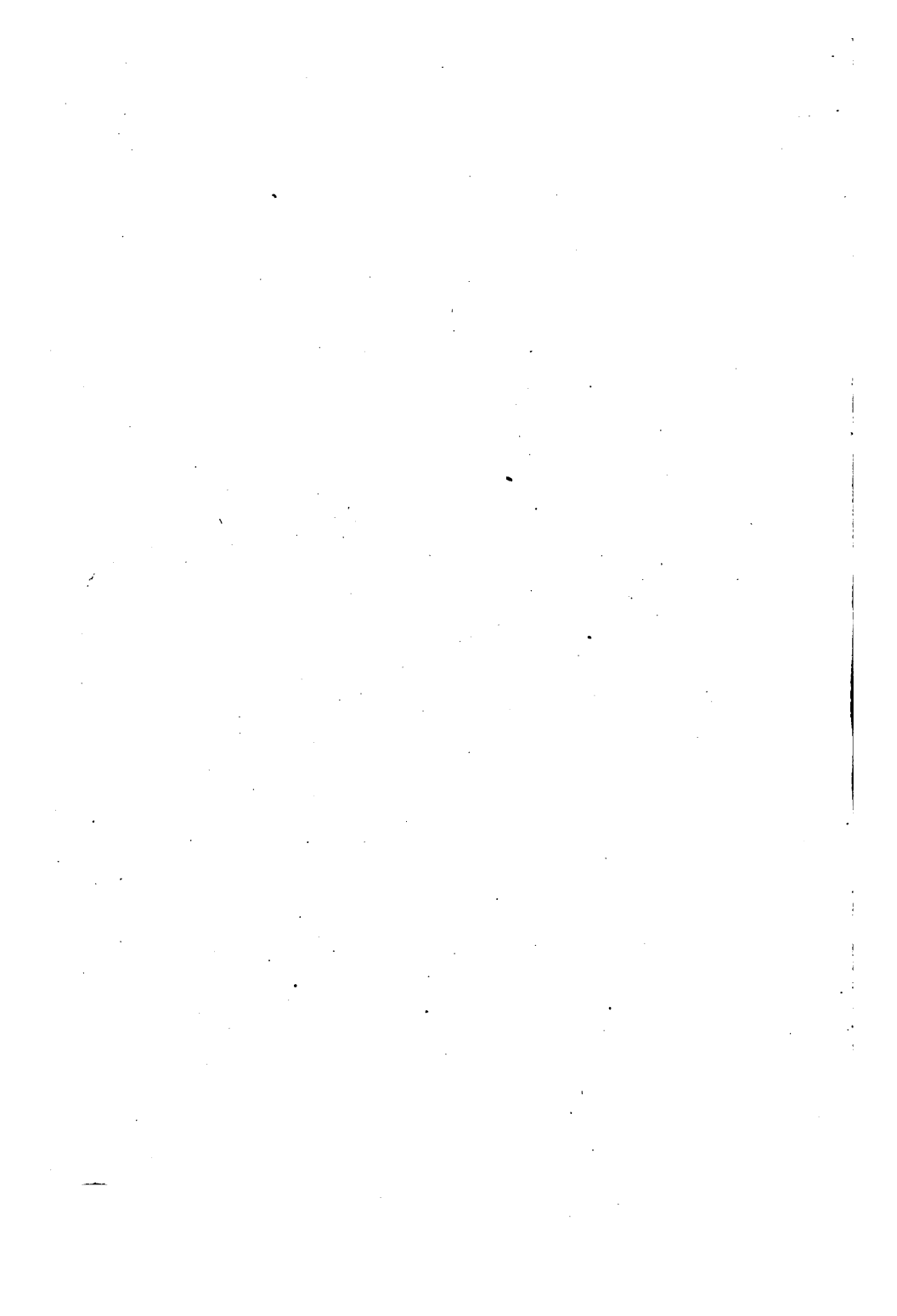
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THE GIFT OF
Victor F. Brown





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THE INDWELLING CHRIST

THE INDWELLING CHRIST

And other Sermons



BY

HENRY ALLON D.D.

MINISTER OF UNION CHAPEL ISLINGTON

NEW YORK

THOMAS WHITTAKER

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20

A melancholy interest attaches to these Sermons. The publication of the volume was regarded as in some sort a Memorial of Dr. Allon's Jubilee, and the revered Pastor had corrected the last of the proofs only a day or two before his sudden and deeply regretted death on the 16th inst.

THE PUBLISHERS.

April 22, 1892.

TO
The CHURCH and CONGREGATION
worshipping in
Union Chapel, Islington,
these Memorials of a lengthened Pastorate,
sustained by their unfailing affection
and co-operation,
are
gratefully inscribed.

6-19-31 Durb



Fr.
Victor F. Brown
6-12-30

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THE INDWELLING CHRIST.



THE INDWELLING CHRIST.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory."—Col. i. 27.

WHO and what is Jesus Christ? Is He a mere creation of religious romance—an ideal personage, upon whom imagination has accumulated its conceptions of excellency—with no authentic history, no demonstration of actual possibility, no inspiration of living example and sympathy?

Or is Jesus Christ only an exceptional man—whether coming in the common order of nature, or specially created by God for the perfect human embodiment of His divine excellences—an inspired genius in the teaching of divine things, a transcendent example of piety, holiness, obedience, and self-sacrifice?

Or is Jesus Christ essentially divine?—the Son of God incarnate; the Redeemer of men through the vicarious death of the cross; the "Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world"?

It is simply futile to say that these different conceptions of Jesus Christ are equal in moral value and inspiration; that they have no differential force in practical religious life; that whatever personally the Christ may have been, it makes no difference in the embodiment in our practical life of the great religious ideas represented by His name.

Religious life demands great inspirations as well as

true ideas ; and the great inspirations are in the true ideas. Men have always known more than they have realised. Momentum is as essential as faculty. Truth in the life of a man is more than truth in the Bible. Are we not all conscious of the practical difference between mere theories of religion and a real life in which they are embodied ? Is there no difference between a teacher and a life-giver ; a human example and a Redeemer ? Every element of our religious consciousness attests the difference, both in the sentiment of our piety, and in the quality and force of our religious impulse. So that the entire feeling and inspiration of our religious life are affected by our conceptions of what Jesus Christ was and did.

What, then is the testimony concerning Him of the New Testament writers ? We can scarcely turn a page of the book without coming upon epithets and phrases applied to Him, that in their largeness and significance, are absolutely startling. And for the most part these occur in ways so incidental and matter-of-course, that they manifestly express the familiar thought of their authors. They have lost all sense of strangeness, they seem half unconscious of their own marvellous meanings, they do not affirm as consciously proclaiming a disputed matter, they do not asseverate as if they were doubtful, they do not argue as if they had to convince, there is no tone of deprecating doubt, there is nothing apologetic in their astounding assertions. They do not seem even to realise that to men first hearing about Jesus Christ, or having but a superficial acquaintance with Him, or to men who have come to conclusions adverse to Him, such epithets and attributions must seem outrageous and blasphemous. Their ideas about Jesus Christ have come to be so assimilated with their normal thought

and life, that, almost unconsciously, they drop into their sentences epithets and phrases designating and describing Him such as are applied to no other being, save the supreme Deity Himself.

Such words and phrases are much more than arguments; they indicate an entireness of conviction that has outgrown all conscious need of argument. Thus, the apostle John affirms of Him that "He was in the beginning with God," that "all things were made by Him," that "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men," that He is "the eternal life," that "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." So the Apostle Paul, in the most casual way, utters phrases such as these: "Christ who is our life," "the Lord Jesus Christ who is our hope," "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and such marvellous affirmations concerning His person and prerogatives as this chapter contains. How came thoughtful men like John and Paul, within a few years of Christ's death—John probably from the time of His death, if not before it—to form conceptions about this Nazarene peasant such as no other human being ever inspired, and to have adopted them so absolutely? To say the least, there must have been in Jesus, and in His teaching, an amazing spiritual force, so that within His short three years' ministry He should have wrought such convictions. It is, I think, the most difficult problem that the rejecter of Christ's divine claims has to solve.

Here is one of these remarkable assertions concerning Christ. The apostle is exulting in his great mission as a preacher of Christ to the Gentiles. It was one of the "mysteries" that he had to reveal—that to the Gentile as well as to the Jew Christ, the Redeemer of men, was to be preached. And within this "mystery" there lay

another—the inscrutable way in which the new spiritual life was to be produced. The Gospel of Christ was not only a transcendent teaching about God's forgiveness of sins, it was the revelation of a special religious life-giving. Christ was to be not only their religious prophet and teacher, He was to be the spiritual quickener of their religious lives. "The first Adam became a living soul, the second Adam a life-giving spirit."

"The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles is Christ in you." Not, I think, in the meagre sense of a mere teacher in the midst of you, but in the greater, profounder sense of a vital indweller—a quickener and nurturer of the spiritual life of human souls. This was a new and startling revelation; the religious life of a man was to be constituted by the vitalising indwelling of Christ—his religious teacher. "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son hath not life." It was a claim so great, and so unique, that a new religious speech for the exposition of it had to be created. The Christian teachers put new meanings into old words; they use terms that are strangely mystical, all involving the idea of life. Religion is not a mere theological belief, nor mere moral conduct, nor mere Church allegiance; it is a condition of individual radical life, and this life is quickened by the indwelling of the Christ.

No wonder that such claims produced great excitement—an intense, worshipping discipleship on the one hand, a passionate rejection and resentment on the other. They were "hard sayings, who could hear them?" Men, accustomed to teachings about prophets like Moses and Isaiah, naturally stumbled at assumptions such as these on the part of this new prophet of Nazareth. It was only gradually that even the twelve

disciples understood and accepted this personal, vital, and spiritual character of the new Kingdom of Heaven.

And familiar with it as we have become, the tendency to regard something else as essential to it is strong in us all. We insist upon creed, or church, or sacrament; "without which," we arrogantly say, "a man cannot be saved." Is there not still need to affirm the essential spirituality and inwardness of the Christian life—its absolute independence, save for help and nurture, of all outward things? "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

As the apostles taught it, this looked two ways: they opposed this conception of personal spiritual life to Jewish Ritualism on the one hand, and to Gentile Rationalism on the other. If a man is not a spiritually religious man simply because he observes a temple ritual and partakes of Church sacraments, neither is he a spiritually religious man because, ethically, he is conscientious and virtuous—"honest, and true, and just." Of course, there can be no true religiousness without virtue. No man is so lofty and so strong in his moral rectitude as the religious man; but religion is a great deal more than virtue—than the ethical sense of right and wrong. It is the spiritual sense of God—sympathy with God; "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit given unto us";—it is the soul of the man "thirsting for God," "crying out for the living God." Moral goodness is the fruit of the religious life, it is not religious life itself.

When, therefore, Jewish Pharisaism urged its national covenant and its religious Ritualism, the contention of the apostle was, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly"; and when Gentile Rationalism urged its moral virtues,

he insisted upon the regeneration of the very heart of the man—the vital indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Have we not here—

First, a distinctive doctrine of the Christ? Who and what is this mysterious personage concerning whom such astounding things are said; whose disciples claim for Him, and who claims for Himself, prerogatives distinctly divine—that he enters the very hearts of men, and is there the source and the nurture of all their spiritual life? “I am the vine, ye are the branches; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.” So that even a great godly man like Paul avows that it is not he that lives, but “Christ that liveth in him.”

It will scarcely be contended that this is merely inflated metaphor, or rhetorical exaggeration. The terms would be extravagant and preposterous applied to the most transcendent teacher simply as such. No Jew ever thought of saying such things about Moses or Isaiah; no Buddhist ever had such conceptions of the Buddha; no Mohammedan ever put forth such claims for Mohammed. There are rational limits to even figurative eulogy. Clearly these are measured conceptions of Christ's character; they are the terms by which these men interpret their new religious life in Him; and they indicate amazing conclusions concerning Him. Just as they speak of God as the creating cause and the nurturing source of all physical life, they speak of Jesus Christ as the creating cause and the nurturing source of all spiritual life. Not only do they speak of Christ's own

spiritual life as transcendent, they speak of him as the specific cause of spiritual life in others ; and in terms that cannot be interpreted by the ordinary moral influence of example. He is in vital contact with each individual soul—your soul and mine—not merely teaching it truth, exciting it by His genius, constraining it by His example, but causing it by that mystic energy that produces life. It is not the mere food that we eat that causes physical life. It is not the mere deposit of the seed-corn that produces the harvest. “God giveth it a life as it hath pleased Him.” Life is God’s secret. The man of science is as unable to penetrate the mystery of physical life as is the theologian to penetrate the mystery of spiritual life. The life of a plant is as inscrutable as the life of a soul. The startling thing is that the power of quickening spiritual life should be attributed to Jesus Christ. This, indeed, is Paul’s supreme “mystery”—that religiousness in spiritual men should, in this divine way, be wrought by Him.

But He who can do all this, and be all this to the spiritual nature of man, must be a being of transcendent character and prerogative. It is a greater thing to produce spiritual life in a soul than to produce physical life in a body. The creation is of a nobler type ; its nurture demands a greater providence ; a higher order of ministering influences must be employed ; the process is loftier ; the results are grander. He who can so quicken and sustain in me such spiritual principles and religious affections must possess attributes of wisdom, power, and spirituality, which it is difficult to conceive of as other than divine. One of Paul’s cogent arguments is that from the physical creation we may justly infer the “eternal power and godhead” of the Creator. The Psalmist tells that “the heavens declare the glory of

God, and the firmament sheweth forth His handiwork."
Milton sings :

"These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty ! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair ; Thyself how wondrous then !
Unspeakable, who sitt'st above these heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these Thy lowest works ; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."

If the reasoning be legitimate, what must be our inference concerning Jesus Christ from the religious life which He produces in a Christian man ? What must He be, who, out of such crude and damaged moral materials, can produce a character so godlike ?

When I realise my own wayward will and perverse affections, in their uncontrollable folly and sin, I feel that He who can so rule these—who, in a soul so sinful, can effect the great and mystic change which we call "conversion," which, often with startling suddenness, reverses the strongest passions of our nature, makes the drunkard sober, the liar truthful, the sensual chaste, the selfish self-sacrificing, the blasphemous pray—must wield forces that are well-nigh almighty. I appreciate this when I try to effect this transformation by my own unaided resolutions and endeavours—to break away from sin, to attain to holiness. How powerless I feel ! How the lust, the habit hold me captive ! "I know the better, and pursue the worse." "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death ?"

Who is this mighty Christ, through whose magical power I am at once delivered ; who suddenly touches me into strong, regnant, religious life ; and who, concerning His own prerogative, speaks in this way, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to

the Son also to have life in Himself"; "As the Father raiseth the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will"? No man can be farther removed from the exaggerations of personal vanity, or from the hallucinations of fanaticism, than Jesus of Nazareth. He never utters an inflated word, He never indulges even in the fervid rhetoric or the poetic imaginations of the old Hebrew psalmists or prophets; every word is full of calm, controlled life. And yet he explicitly claims to wield the mightiest of spiritual forces, to achieve the mightiest spiritual works, after the very manner of God's own transcendent working. And, strange to say, the actual results, in their magnitude and process, perfectly harmonize with these claims.

How are we to judge them? If, as we are told, they are the fanatical exaggerations of His enthusiastic disciples, we can say only that their fanatical misconceptions are morally grander and more harmonious than measured and admitted truth; the biographer is more than his hero; and the marvellous phenomena of Christian discipleship, and of the special forces that produce them are a hallucination. If Jesus Christ was a fanatic, imagining Himself to be more than He really was, how are we to reconcile His hallucination with the intellectual greatness and sobriety of His discourse and of His general bearing? If He was wilfully practising a deception, His moral character suffers more than that of any impostor that the world has seen. He claims more, and the claim is less excusable.

Who, then, I again ask, who is He, through whom, as a matter of actual experience, I thus practically realise the greatest possibilities, the loftiest aspirations of my being; who makes effectual in me the greatest spiritual forces; who becomes my daily bread; so that through His

nurture I consciously realise my highest life : He who, from the day of His crucifixion, has exerted this peculiar spiritual force in men of every nation, condition, and character, and never more potently and variously than He is exerting it now,—thus marvellously fulfilling His own daring prediction, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself” ?

Debate as you will about the theological Christ, here is the historical Christ, who indisputably has done all this, and who has to be accounted for. So long as He thus marvellously works in human souls, you cannot, I think, stop very far short of conceptions and of worship of the Divine.

Ay, and the loftier the conception of Him, the greater the practical inspiration. If I try to lessen the intellectual difficulty by lowering my recognition of the divine nature and authority of Jesus Christ, precisely in that degree I weaken the practical religious force. It needs a divine Redeemer to save a penitent thief. Only a Christ can lift up the woman who was a sinner. Let me think of the Christ as only a man, however peerless ; as only a prophet, however commissioned ; as only a religious genius, however greatly inspired ; or as only a special human embodiment of the moral qualities of God's nature—in the sense in which physical nature is an embodiment of, what we call, His natural attributes—and the spiritual force that quickens and inspires my religious life is incalculably lessened. As a simple matter of historic fact and of individual consciousness, the greatest forces that move us are the divinest elements of our conception of Christ. Whether you take the experiences of personal religious life, or the inspirations of evangelical agencies and philanthropic efforts, the highest, the holiest, the strongest religiousness has

always been inspired by the loftiest conceptions of Christ's person and prerogatives. The wildest sect, so recognising Christ, will have a large and self-sacrificing response to its most Utopian schemes; while the torpid heart of the most intellectual believers in His humanity only can be but feebly inspired to a response of the most rational, religious, or secular philanthropy. Wherever you find a quickening or revival of religious life, or a Christian mission to heathen nations, there you find evangelical beliefs; wherever you find a great social philanthropy, there you find evangelical inspirations.

The suggestion, moreover, is not only of the divinity of Christ's power, it is also of the benignity of His character and mission.

It is as the giver of life that He is recognised, and that the noblest life of which our nature is capable: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." What bestowment can be greater or more beneficent than the distinctive spiritual life which makes us "sons of God"?

Is it not another very wonderful characteristic; that every element that goes to make up the New Testament conception of Jesus Christ is as transcendent in its love as it is in its holiness? His character is a conception, a portraiture, a living embodiment of exquisite gentleness and tenderness, in combination with perfect holiness and unfaltering moral purpose.

Whence did these New Testament writers—some eight or nine contemporary men, the majority of them unlettered—get such a conception as this, which, in its purity and spirituality, its human benevolence and divine greatness, its congruity and sublimity, infinitely transcends every other conception of human imagination? If they did simply imagine, or construe out of a phos-

phorescent tradition biographical elements like the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection; miracles like the Transfiguration, and the raising of Lazarus; teachings like the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the prodigal son, and the discourse of the night in which He was betrayed, and attribute them to Jesus, "a greater than Jesus is here." If Jesus Christ had never lived, could He ever have been imagined? Rousseau is right:—"The creator of such an imaginary character would have been greater than his hero." Perhaps, holiness such as His might have been imagined; but not in combination with such yearning tender pity. The predominant feeling that Jesus Christ excites is not that of even peerless sanctity, but of ineffable love:—"He loved me, and gave Himself for me." To redeem us from the power of sin, to make us holy and rejoicing sons of God, was the purpose and passion of His life. Not that there was attractiveness in us, save the fascination that misery always exerts upon genuine pity. The very greatness of the moral ruin moved Him to seek its restoration. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "Not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Here is a life that, from first to last, is consecrated to this magnanimous, loving purpose. By the sacrifice of Himself He will redeem men—by enabling their forgiveness, and by restoring to them the spiritual life that they have lost.

This, at any rate, is the sublime conception of the writers of the New Testament. Wonderful if it be the simple record of a historical reality; unspeakably more wonderful if it be the creation of eight or nine contemporaneous writers of religious romance. The eternal

Son of the Father conceived of as so moved by yearning love for sinful men, and as so construing the imperative demands of divine righteousness, as to make for their redemption all the sacrifices recorded in New Testament history! It is verily a sublime doctrine of the Christ. Nay, not of the Christ only—it is an entirely new conception of the supreme Deity himself. God is represented as pitying sinful men with a love of such yearning intensity as to make personal sacrifices for their redemption. “He *spared not* His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all”—a phrase of infinite suggestiveness and pathos! No such feeling is intimated in connection with any other gift. He is the glad giver of the sunshine and the rain. “He delighteth in mercy.” But, as if it cost Him effort, as if He had to overcome reluctance before He could bring Himself to it, to urge Himself to some violence of affectionate feeling, it is affirmed concerning the gift of Jesus Christ, that “He *spared not* His own Son.” “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” True or false, the conception is one of transcendent moral sublimity.

I will not, I say, try to assure myself of Christianity by lessening and lowering this wonderful conception. Why should I try to make God’s thoughts like my thoughts, God’s ways like my ways? The loftier my conceptions of the Christ the greater my trust in Him. Dare I confide in so divine a holiness, without the accompanying demonstration of so divine a love? Dare I confide in so tender a love, without the guarantee of so peerless a holiness? The more absolute the combination of transcendent holiness and transcendent love, the more assured of my salvation I am. “Righteousness and peace kiss each other.” It is, I say, a sublime and

distinctive doctrine of the character and work of the Christ.

It is also a distinctive conception of personal religious life.

Not only does Christ originate it, but it implies a peculiar relationship to Him—personal, vital, loving.

I am not merely one of a crowd, listening to the religious teachings of a great prophet, and then retiring to unsuspected solitudes, to ponder his doctrines, and to shape my religious life according to my conceptions of them. I am not the mere recipient of a dispensational grace, indiscriminately falling upon me, like the sunshine or the rain. I am an individual person, recognised as such, and quickened to spiritual life by the great life-giver. All the relations of my soul to Christ are personal, vital, and conscious. He “knocks at the door of my heart,” and tells me that if I will open unto Him He will come in unto me; not merely to worship with me, or to hold formal religious fellowship with me, but to “sup with me”—to mingle with the pursuits, to inspire the joys, of my common life. If I refuse to admit Him He bewails my refusal with tears. “If thou hadst known.” “How often would I have gathered thee!” “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.” He comes to me in individual recognition, in personal inspiration, in intelligent fellowship, in affectionate sympathy, in discriminating help. I speak to Him all my thoughts and feelings. I tell Him my secret in the common prayer of the congregation. He blesses me with an individual application of the common grace. I consciously hold intercourse with Him, in more intimate, uncalculating confidence than a man with his friend. He represents Himself as “the Shep-

herd of the sheep," as "calling His own sheep by name and leading them out." "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers."

How individual it all is! What a unique conception of religious life and inspiration it is! His is not a common benevolence, it is a personal, discriminating love. Mine is not a general loyalty, it is a distinctive affection and service—a worship, a consecration, and, if needs be, a martyrdom.

What a peculiar economy of practical religious life this constitutes! Every inspiration is personal. Christ discriminates my individual life; my individual life responds to His recognition. The love of Christ appeals to my spiritual affections; my spiritual affections respond in personal love and consecration. Christ inspires and rules all the developments of my spiritual life, from its first feeble beginnings and partial apprehensions to the full perfection of its intelligence and sanctity and strength. Christ the quickener of the seed; Christ the ripener of the harvest! How utterly different from all other religious representations! Moses is never thought of as so related to the Jews; the Buddha to his followers; Mohammed to Mohammedans: they inspire no such personal consciousness or sentiment.

Through all the stages of my religious life the development is vital, and is perfectly natural; but Christ is uniformly the mysterious life-giver—quickening, inspiring, nurturing the entire growth. His divine energy, as in other domains of life, mingles with every human thought, and feeling, and consciousness. Commanding all resources, He ministers to all my individual necessities; He meets every peculiarity of my character and

circumstances. He informs my thoughts, attempers my affections, solicits my aspirations, directs my purposes, and imparts my strength. In all my peculiar necessities, weaknesses, and temptations, He is my helper; "touched with the feeling of my infirmities;" "supplying all my need out of the riches of His fulness." As my spiritual life advances, from the timid ignorance and feeble endeavours of its first beginnings to the fulness of its power and satisfaction, it is simply a "growing up into Christ the living Head in all things."

What a vast field of illustration in the experiences of Christian life is thus opened to us!

He presents to me great spiritual truths. I receive them with intelligence, sympathy, and absolute faith. He proffers to me the forgiveness of my sins. I joyfully accept His grace, in full recognition of His sacrifice on the cross. He urges me to personal and practical holiness. With a grateful consecration I strive. In the practical ways of my life I daily demonstrate the character and power of His inspirations. I am faithful to my sense of right. I set before me His own peerless perfection. I subdue evil passions. I "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts." "By whom the world is crucified to me and I unto the world." "I am not mine own. I am bought with a price." "The love of Christ constraineth me." My gratitude responds to His love; my life to His quickening; my religiousness to His grace. "I work out my own salvation with fear and trembling because He worketh in me." "I give all diligence to make my calling and election sure." He proposes Himself as my Redeemer from sin. I implicitly receive Him as such. "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby I can be saved." He tells me that He is "the Bread of Life,"

"the manna that came down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall live for ever." In the hunger of my soul I come to Him, and inspire and strengthen my languid life. I fill my thoughts with His great ideas. I yield my heart to His great inspirations. And in them I find the greatest practical forces of my being. Through them I realise my noblest sanctities and services.

Thus we may understand the true character of spiritual life as a growth. It cannot be wrought by any miracle of mere power; it can be quickened and developed only by vital energies. "We cease to do evil, and learn to do well." "First the seed, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." "The law in our members wars against the law of our mind." Thus we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Thus we recognise the difference between the weakness that is overcome of temptation and the wickedness that purposes evil. The immature faith of a Peter may fail and fall, but he can appeal from the very failure of his weakness to the heart of his love. "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." The victory is gradual. We "go from strength to strength;" the "image of the earthy" is gradually effaced—the "image of the heavenly" is perfectly produced. In spiritual experience we are conscious of the indwelling Christ—in yearnings for God, in holy affections and growing sympathies, in passionate consecration, in pious, fervent, joyous worship, in ineffable communion. In our relations to our brother men the indwelling of Christ is manifested in the purity, rectitude, and benevolence of all our relations to them. "He that abideth in Me and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." The religious life that does not find expression

in ways of piety, holiness, and unselfishness is spurious and worthless. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Christian life, then, is not mere belief in Christian doctrines, nor mere observance of Christian ritual, nor the mere keeping of commandments. It is the very heart of the man, quickened and sanctified by forces of spiritual life, and finding the natural expression of life in everything we do. And the quickening force and inspiration is the indwelling Christ.

This also gives us a new and distinctive ground of Christian hope. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Again the idea is of something vital. The hope of glory is rooted in experiences of spiritual life, quickened by Christ. We may rest our hope of glory, as Plato did, upon metaphysical or philosophical reasonings about the constitution of man, the natural immortality of the human soul, the capabilities and purposes of human creatures. Or we may rest our hope of glory upon Scripture texts and teachings. "Christ has brought life and immortality to light," and has promised it to His disciples. This is not the ground of the apostle's hope, save as he conceives of true discipleship as the conscious indwelling of Christ. No consciousness is so indubitable as the consciousness of life; and spiritual life is essentially "eternal life"—life that is immortal in virtue of its own essential qualities, its own natural issues. "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." The life that Christ quickens is life that must perpetuate itself in the Heavenly glory. Hence it is spoken of, not as a mere reward, but as an "inheritance." In virtue of its spiritual birthright the regenerated soul "inherits glory, honour, immortality."

Therefore it is "a sure and certain hope." "We have the witness in ourselves." "We are begotten again to a living hope."

In this way "the powers of the world to come" work very mightily in a Christian man. They are not mere external inducements; they are the inherent spiritual forces of his own nature. All his doings are spiritual forces, and have Heavenly issues. Because his life here has its root and satisfaction in Christ it will have its consummation in Christ for ever and ever.

Therefore it is that men in whom the Christ-life is strong think so little of death—meet it with such confidence, triumph, even with song, as they fall beneath its power. A good man's death-bed is often a strange exultation and rapture, which even the breaking bonds of the tenderest human relationships cannot repress. "If ye loved Me ye would rejoice, because I go to the Father." "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." "To depart and be with Christ is far better."

My friends, this is a marvellous conception of the Christian life of a man. Like every Christian idea, it is radical—it goes to the very centre of his being, it rules everything that he does and is. And it assures him by a relationship to Christ that is vital, and loving, and inviolable.

Is it, I ask again, only a religious imagination, or is it an actual human experience? Well, nineteen hundred years of Christian history attest it. It has been the vital consciousness of myriads of the greatest intellects and the noblest hearts of human history; and it has produced the holiest and most beneficent lives that the world has seen.

And what is, perhaps, a still more conclusive demonstration, it is a life realised every day by myriads of

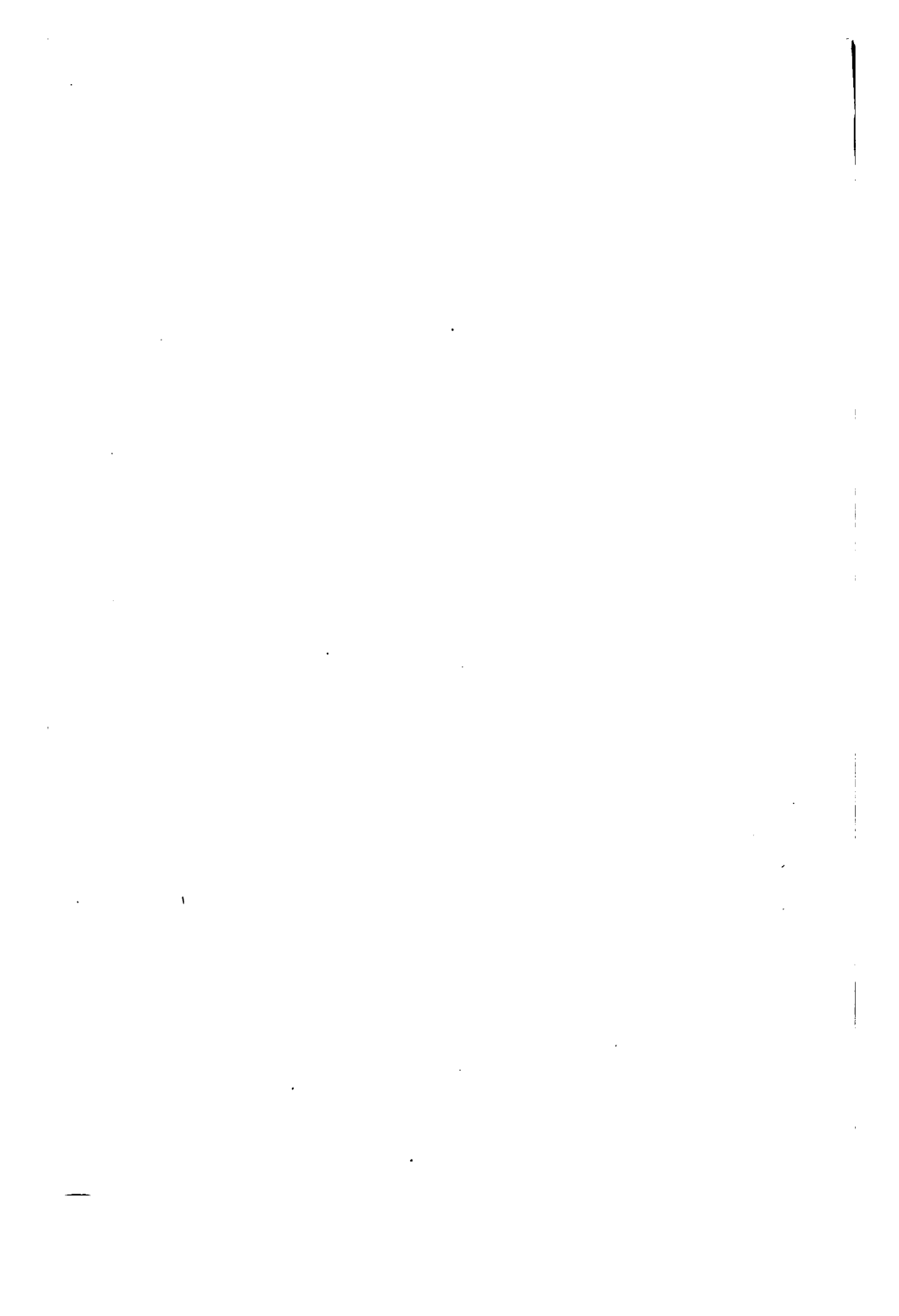
men and women who are feeble in faculty, limited in intelligence, meagre in imagination, innocent alike of the visions of the poet, the reasonings of the philosopher, the knowledge of history, and even the common culture of society. It takes hold of the most degraded classes of social life—often of the most brutalised instances—and somehow it works upon them a strange transforming spell, and they forthwith become penitent, pure, and consecrated. Ask them; they know very little of theology; but somehow or other they have the consciousness of a new life within them—they feel its quickenings, they attain to its sanctities, they prove its strength in temptation, its solace in sorrow, they exult in its blessed hope, and are faithful even unto death. No circumstances can extinguish their religious joy; no reasoning can destroy their indubitable faith. They have the consciousness of life.

How is all this to be accounted for—the history of generations, the transformation of individual lives, the religious and moral elevation of nations? Is it a stupendous delusion that has thus befallen the greatest intellects, the noblest affections of men, ruling life and conquering death? Can it be possible that the grandest spiritual results which the history of the world records have been wrought by illicit means? For my own part, I am not credulous enough to believe this. I can believe in such power as that by which the New Testament accounts for the influence of Christianity. I cannot believe in such an incongruous delusion.

What a mighty practical force in life it is! It makes the ignorant, feeble pauper greater than circumstance, passion, and death. No life that man knows is so noble, so fruitful, so blessed. It is an indwelling power that transfigures all things; makes all things possible. It

makes the humblest, weakest believer a conquering and rejoicing son of God.

Is not such a life worth living? Worth all sacrifice of temporal interests, sensual gratifications, sinful passions? How grandly men would live; how noble and blessed the world would be did all men thus realise "the life that is hid with Christ in God"! The Apocalyptic vision would be fulfilled: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."



THE RELIGIOUS ESTIMATE OF MAN.

THE RELIGIOUS ESTIMATE OF MAN.

PSALM VIII.

A TRUE conception of what God is, is an essential condition of true conceptions of our own manhood. Our moral consciousness is imperfect and disordered ; it is only when God "shines in our hearts and gives us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," that we truly estimate ourselves.

The Bible is not only a supernatural revelation to men of God's true being and character, it is a history of the gradual growth of men in the knowledge of God.

In the early portions of the Old Testament we find the crudest and most erroneous conceptions of God. He is spoken of as if He were little more than a magnified man, having much of the passion and waywardness of human nature ; and we find a corresponding degree of imperfect religiousness and morality in man.

God speaks to men as they are able to bear it ; leading them step by step to truer and nobler conceptions, permitting many things "because of the hardness of their hearts," until He reveals His true spiritual character and glory in Jesus Christ, and men attain to lofty spiritual conceptions of religion.

And, from the time of Jesus Christ until now, the same process has been going on. Men have been learn-

ing more and more about God, rising to higher and worthier conceptions of Christ's teaching about God. The volume of supernatural revelation is complete ; but we grow in spiritual understanding of it—just as physical science grows in understanding of the completed creation. As men grow in spiritual intelligence and feeling, their ideas of God will grow loftier and purer. The teachings of Jesus Christ have depths and breadths of meaning which demand a lofty spiritual intelligence and sympathy for their discernment.

If men did but recognise this historical progress of Biblical ideas and representations of God, and the constant advance of spiritual understanding in those to whom they are addressed, how utterly irrelevant and foolish half our theological and evidential controversies would be !

Next, therefore, in importance to true ideas of God, are true conceptions of man. Religion is the recognition of man's relations to God. If there were no personal, moral, and spiritual God, there could be no religion. Ethics there might be—an instinctive, unintelligent sense of what was right towards other men—but there could be no religion. And if man be not a moral and spiritual being, there can be no religion. Just, therefore, in proportion as we conceive erroneously, or unworthily of God, is our religious life objectively disabled ; while just in proportion as we conceive erroneously or unworthily of our own manhood, is our subjective power of attaining to lofty spiritual life weakened and debased.

So that the speculations about what God is, and what man is, which seem so metaphysical and unpractical, have really a very potent influence in determining what the character and tone of our practical life shall be. As I conceive of God, as I conceive of my personal rela-

tion to God, the spirituality and the inspiration of my practical religious life will be.

Here, then, is the Biblical estimate of man—"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" David puts the question with wondering, grateful appreciation. Job puts it with bitter sarcasm. It seems a deliberate parody. David puts the question, "What is man?" wondering at God's blessing of him; Job parodies the question, as if man had been created only for God's curse. God is conceived of as a terrible man-watcher. He never omits a morning without visiting him, a moment without testing him. He lives, as it were, under an evil eye; God will not let him alone. It is an outburst of wild and terrible sarcasm—one of those passionate remonstrances and defiances of the Almighty that, in their right-hearted, wrong-headed feeling, make the Book of Job so sublime. All great truths, according as they are regarded, are to our life as a pillar of fire or a pillar of cloud.

On the other hand, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes the psalm to show how grand human nature is, inasmuch as Christ could be incarnate in it.

We are therefore justified in saying that, just as the Bible teaches the noblest and most inspiring ideas of God, so it teaches the noblest and most inspiring ideas of man.

The world is full of speculative teachings about human nature—from the old philosophical theories of Epicurus or Plato to the modern speculative theories of Mr. Herbert Spencer; from Hippocrates to the modern materialist. Are we not justified in affirming that the Bible theory and estimate of man is not only the noblest and most inspiring, but that it is the most rational? It solves the greatest number of problems; it is most in

accord with all that consciousness and experience teach us concerning human nature.

Religiously, the practical importance of this is very great. If, as a human creature, I am only a higher kind of brute, if—not in my physical body only, but also in my reasoning mind, my spiritual soul—I am physiologically developed from a common ancestry, destined to a common annihilation, why should I care about living greatly? I am deprived of my chief elements of self-respect, of my chief stimulus to excellence, of the dignity of a great heritage, of the assurance of a great destiny.

Tell me, as the Bible tells me, that I am a moral creature, a child of God, created after God's image, that my sinfulness is only the lapse or fall of an intrinsically noble nature, that I am redeemed from it by Christ, that I can hold fellowship of thought and feeling with God Himself, that His spiritual nature and mine are one, and that I shall be with Him for ever; you fill me with the inspirations of a great consciousness and of a great hope. Such a relationship, such a destiny, such a conscious being are worth living for. Conceptions such as these are infinitely more than mere theories of being; they are the greatest practical moral forces that influence my life.

How is it that unreligious theories of life so uniformly degrade human nature, lessen its dignity, deteriorate its quality, loosen its moral obligations, extinguish its greatest hopes?

What a transcendent place in the Biblical record of the creation, in the Biblical history of the race, in the Biblical theory of religion, man is represented as holding! No matter whether the first chapters of Genesis be literal history, or simply a religious teaching of the

divine origin of things in poetical or parabolic form, the conception is the same ; as if God had sought to manifest in man His own glorious being, to provide in man special gratifications for His own divine affections.

The creation of man is marked by a distinct change of formula and feeling. Hitherto the record has been of a simple mandate, "Let there be"; now there is a softening of the imperative into something like consideration or conference, "Let us make man," as if in the creating process there were a pause, because the next step was so big with destiny. There is the feeling of a special solemnity ; the Creator is represented as deliberating concerning His purpose, and as formulating its method—"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"—and as pronouncing upon him when formed a special benediction. Especially worthy of note is the reason assigned for the special creation of woman ; "For Adam there was not found a help-meet for him." "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him ; male and female created He them."

For the moment I raise no question about the historical character of the record. I insist simply upon the grandeur of the idea ; the representation distinguishes man from every other existence. Next to God Himself, he is the greatest of beings—the greatest in conception, the greatest in actual character. The material element of man's nature has this record : "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." If the theory of evolution be established, it is true thus far—the bodily organization is made of the dust of the earth ; it is not so much a creation as a development out of existing materials. It claims no higher origin than the brutes that perish. It has the

same physical qualities, necessities, and gratifications ; but with a suggestive record of special divine interposition in its development. Man's nobler constituents have thus fixed upon them conditions of meanness and shame ; the mind, the soul, are not the body, but they are so closely associated with it that it is the condition of their activity ; if the body is injured they are disabled ; "the heavenly treasure is in earthly vessels."

But how noble even the physical structure, reared out of materials so mean ! The power, the skill, the beneficent purpose ; the ingenuities and niceties of contrivance ; the combination of utility, strength, and grace ; the variety of parts, functions, and adaptations ; the symmetry of members, the harmony of organs, the erect and noble mien, the flexibility and grace of motion ; the mobile expression of countenance, even after the dull and sorrowful impress of sin is stamped upon it ! How natural the fine rapture of the Psalmist : "I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," and with significant emphasis he adds, "that my soul knoweth right well" ! To this side of man's nature belong, too, its feebleness and frailty, its processes of growth, maturity, and decay, its liability to disease, to accident, to destruction, to death, its dependence upon physical ministries—food, clothing, sleep. How helpless the life of infancy, how pitiable the debility of age ! How frail and transient is man, the physical animal—the structure "made out of the dust of the ground" ! The life that animates it—the breath of God—is susceptible of no analysis ; it explains itself to no philosophy ; science can give no account of it. Life is God's secret—the subtle essence which by its presence animates, conserves, and fructifies the organism, and by its absence leaves it to insensibility, immobility, and decay. Only,

here is suggested some special, transcendent order of life.

If science can demonstrate that the physical structure of man is evolved from some lower organism—a mollusc or protoplasm—religion has nothing to object. The divine origin of things is not touched; rather is the greatness of the divine prescience, provision, and resource more wonderfully exhibited. Only let the demonstration be complete before belief is demanded. Analogy, partial resemblance, presumption, are not sufficient. I remember hearing Mr. Huxley say in a lecture on Mammals that, even physiologically, a broad, deep, unbridged gulf separates animal man from all other animals. There are missing links in the chain of development that should compel theory to wait until they are supplied. The development of dead matter into vegetable life, and, more inexplicable still, of animal life into rational intelligence, and of rational intelligence into moral and spiritual consciousness, have to be accounted for. A chain with missing links so vital is not even science. Those who claim that our entire manhood is thus developed, may well, in the name of science itself, be rebuked for premature dogmatism; while those who put forth the claim for only the animal man may fairly be asked to complete their demonstration before unscientific ignorance is asked to believe.

In his entire nature, how immeasurably this being of intelligence and of moral feeling transcends all other creatures! If man is not the reason for the existence of the material earth itself, can we doubt that the earth is specially and purposely prepared for him? Is he not more than an evolution out of it? How can the effect be greater than its cause?

Does not my own consciousness attest all this? I

know myself, I can think about myself ; " I think, therefore I am." I can love—love God, love goodness, love my fellow-man. I am separated from brutes by infinite depths and distances ; my nature is not only grander, it is consciously different. It seeks greater ends, realises nobler things. No reasoning, no science can destroy this consciousness. Nor can it, I think, be called an ignorant vanity. It is deepest and strongest in the holiest and lowliest men. The sense of God, and of nearness to Him, is greatest where the feeling of dependence is most.

From the beginning to the end of it the Bible magnifies man. It has no derogatory theories of human origin, character, or destiny. About the evil that there is in human nature it has plenty to say ; but how great a being sinning man must be, when the entire idea of the Bible is his redemption from sin, and when, to achieve it, the only begotten Son becomes incarnate ! God pities him, and sacrifices Himself that He may redeem him. It is the godlike quality of moral freedom that has been abused. It is God's image that has been defaced, and that is to be restored. Man is God's child. He may sin ; he cannot sever this link of the divine Fatherhood ; a prodigal son he may be ; he is a son still. It is the greatness of man's nature that gives its grave and awful character to sin ; that prompts its amazing redemption.

✱ The difficulty of religious teachers is to get men to think highly enough and seriously enough of their own being—to think and feel in harmony with God's estimate of it. There is neither scripturalness nor religiousness in depreciating it. There is no inspiration in mean estimates. The sinful fall of a great nature must not be confounded with essential qualities. Sinfulness is

not man's primitive characteristic. It is not his necessary experience; it will not be his final condition. It has occurred since his history began. He is to be redeemed from it by the sacrifice of the cross. It is to be mourned over with shame as a crime, not to be excused as a natural necessity, nor merely sorrowed over as a calamity. The Bible never loses sight of this distinction; it deplores and denounces the sin, but it magnifies the divine constitution of the being that can sin, and it urges upon him his redemption.

Is not all this accordant with the highest reason? God must magnify, must set His heart upon His noblest creation—His creature man—the being that can think His thoughts after Him, sympathize with His moral nature, obey and love Him; who is “a partaker of the divine nature,” who can “drink of the river of His pleasures.” In the moral character of His being, a man must be to his Maker more than a thousand worlds.

I scarcely need to dwell upon the distinct indications and proofs of God's high estimate of man which the Bible contains.

I have spoken of the record of his origin, made in “the likeness of God”—a moral, holy, spiritual being.

Why should we not believe this old Bible record? Even if man's body be the product of physical evolution, his mind, his soul have to be accounted for. Why should not God have directly produced them? Every other theory utterly breaks down as incongruous or insufficient, while every fact in man's consciousness and history accords with it.

The Fall! Yes, all history corroborates the theory. Man's uniform process, as history attests it, has been a deterioration. Is any theory of polytheism so well attested as that it has ever been the corruption of a

purser theism? Where special religious forces have not counteracted, man has uniformly fallen into superstition, vice, and savagery.

Of the qualities that characterise him I have also spoken. What a constant representation of his great capacities the Bible gives us! Amid the wonderful varieties of creature existence he stands supreme. "Thou didst set him over the works of Thine hands." All things are given to him for his food and use. He can think, acquire knowledge, achieve works of genius, fill the earth with literary and scientific creations. He can converse, and love, reciprocate tender affections, feel subtle sympathies, sacrifice himself in great benevolences. He can fear, and hope, imagine the future, and prepare for it.

Especially does the Bible indicate his religious capacities. He can worship, realize the eternal and the infinite, enter into mystic raptures of devotion—the awe, the reverence, the love of religious praise and prayer—receive God's thoughts, pour out his heart to God. Think of the implicit faith of Abraham, the devout fervours of David, the religious imaginations of Isaiah, the theological thought of Paul, the spiritual sublimities of John! Only God Himself can fill the capacities and yearnings of a man. All the created good that can be accumulated cannot satisfy a soul. He can "drink of the river of God's pleasures," feel the same affections, live for the same ends. The sun is unconscious of its Maker; it does not see its own light. Man can rejoice in the glory of God, call Him Father, and enjoy Him for ever.

But, perhaps, the chief testimony of the Bible to man's greatness is its representation of God's moral treatment of him in his fall and misery. The wonderful economy of redemption, first intimated at his fall, gradu-

ally developed through the marvellous revelations and institutions of Bible history—primitive sacrifices, the entire national history and institutions of the Jews, the anticipations and predictions of Jewish prophets. Say that this record of some forty different writers, extending through fifteen centuries, is all a religious romance, a pious imagination,—you exalt the Bible to the place of an absolute intellectual miracle! Throughout, every touch is in perfect harmony with this underlying estimate of man.

Especially is this illustrated in the moral and spiritual characteristics of the great redeeming idea—the principles and potencies involved in it, the unspeakable love and pity of God, the ineffable holiness and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Think of the patience and sorrowfulness of God's long suffering, of the moral respect and delicacy of his methods of presenting and urging His salvation; the preaching of this as a gospel throughout the world—a preaching of purely moral ideas and forces, seeking to win men solely by appealing to what is best in them, presenting to their conscience and heart the loftiest holiness, truth, and love! What a reverence for man there is in the Christian propaganda! It will not coerce him, it will not pander to bad passions, it will not compromise a single righteousness. It will work only through the noblest and purest feelings—sorrow for sin, the uncompromising abandonment of sin in its most secret feeling, the perfect holiness that was in Jesus Christ. The ethic of the Gospel is the loftiest that the world has known; there is no other that can be compared with it.

Think of the simple conception of the new birth of the Spirit—the entire man made holy by holy truth, brought into fellowship of heart with God! Think of

the providential discipline of character, of the moral uses of adversity, of the conception of the redeemed in Heaven! There is not a single degrading or unworthy thought of man in the entire conception of him in the Bible.

If time permitted, it might be shown how this Christian homage to human nature has practically wrought amongst the peoples that Christianity has influenced. Is it not enough to suggest the contrast between the humanity of Christian nations and that of pagan peoples—even the loftiest peoples of Christian antiquity; nay, between the human pity and benevolence of religious people and Churches and those of the unreligious? The history of humane legislation, of beneficent institutions, of remedial agencies is identified with Christian inspirations. You could scarcely name a beneficent enterprise that is not more or less identified with Christian impulses and prominent names. We have only, I say, thus to contrast with these the notions about human beings of the old pagan world, not only of its rulers and legislators, but of its philosophers and poets.

Even the legislation of Moses created by its provisions a new human sentiment; man was respected simply as man, his rights as man were recognised and guarded. The claims of human brotherhood upon practical sympathy and beneficence were inculcated as they had never been before. Egyptian humanity was tyranny and barbarism in comparison. And what Moses did for the Hebrews, Christianity has far more perfectly done for the world. In Christ Jesus there is "neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor free." The Roman governor sits at the Lord's table with Peter the fisherman, Onesimus the slave with Philemon his master. Who thinks of distinction of class or nation there? At the liberating touch of Christ,

simple manhood springs into liberty, equality, and fraternity. It is a sudden, transfiguring life. One of its first impulses was a community of goods ; its abiding spirit is an essential brotherhood, a boundless benevolence. Paul, a Jew, preaches his gospel to a Philippian jailor, to a heathen slave, to Roman centurions, to Greek philosophers. And its spirit has entered into the consciouness of all Christian nations, and has been redressing oppressions and wrongs ever since. It is a religion not for the devout only, but for men : not for men of exceptional qualities ; it equally regards the most ignorant and commonplace. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Man is more than station or office. Among the saints of the primitive Church are runaway slaves and outcast women.

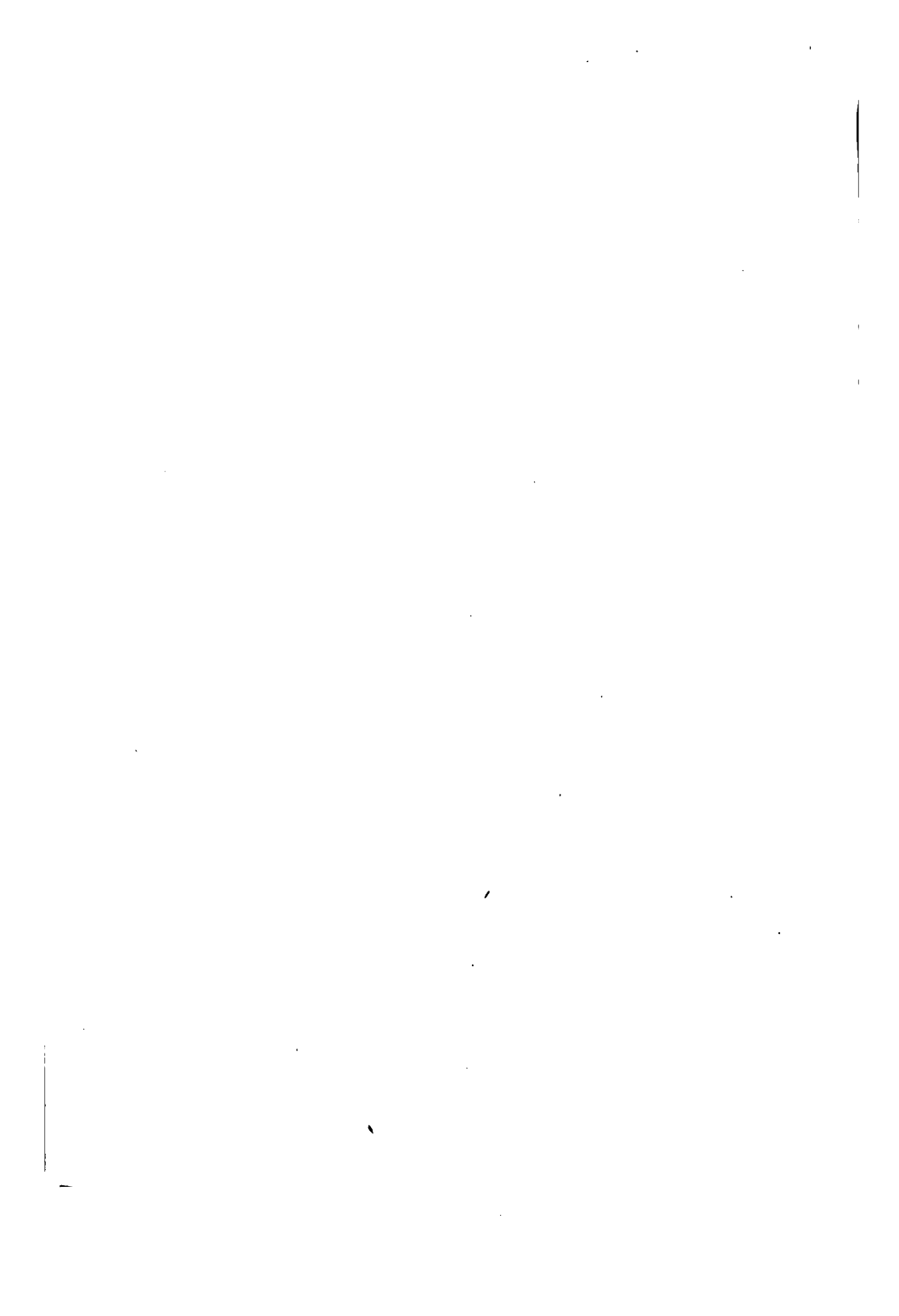
The moral and humane achievements of the Church crowd the page of history, from the abolition of gladiatorial shows in Rome to the abolition of slavery in America ; from the missionary heroism of Paul to the self-sacrifice of the London ragged-school teacher, the conductor of a midnight meeting, or the provider of a thieves' supper. So that the conception of the Bible and the practical working of Christian ideas are perfectly congruous and perfectly unique. Judge them in other respects as you will, they present a marvellous and practical respect for the greatness of human nature. They have been the inspiring power, the fruitful source of all that is humane and noble in our modern life. Jesus Christ has created a new humanity. It is enough to contrast with the great words of respect and hope concerning man which Jesus Christ speaks, such a sorrowful sentence as this, the expression of John Stuart Mill's pessimistic theory of human nature :—

"Man is naturally a lover of dirt, a sort of wild

animal, craftier than the other beasts ; to whom the most criminal actions are not more unnatural than most of the virtues, and to whom the imaginative hope of futurity may be more a burden than a blessing."

Men and brethren, if you would maintain your manhood at its social and moral elevation ; if you would not relapse into the licentiousness of Greece, the hard cruelty of Rome, the degrading sensuousness of the Epicurean, the scornful hardness of the Stoic ; if you would have your men noble, your women pure, your children nurtured in virtue and hope, your family and social life ever advancing in righteousness, purity, liberty, and brotherhood, hold fast by the religion of Jesus Christ.

REST, AND WHERE TO SEEK IT.



REST, AND WHERE TO SEEK IT.

"And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."—PSALM LV. 6.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—MATTHEW XI. 28.

THESE two verses are typical. Both imply human weariness, need, and despondency; and both propose a remedy. David imagines rest, sequestered in a wilderness. Christ promises rest, in the spiritual satisfactions of the soul itself. David, that is, would escape from the troubles of life; Christ would make us invulnerable to them.

David was a king; he could command the outward conditions that are supposed to suffice for a man's satisfaction. He had been successful in life as few men are. He had achieved more, realised more. He stood in higher social and moral nobility. By intrinsic merit and endowment, he, the shepherd boy of Bethlehem, had won the throne of Israel—attained the royal crown, that, through long years, men toil for, and scheme for, and sin for, and often fail to secure after all. And now he commands the resources of a kingdom. He stands in highest honour amongst men. And yet in his songs and moralisings how frequent this note of sadness, unrest, weariness, longing. He yearns for rest like a tired child.

No doubt his great sin and its retributions counted

for much. But it is not so much the feeling of remorse or forfeiture that finds expression, as the feeling of human unsatisfactoriness. He moralises on human life. He recognises its limited measure, its frequent failure, its pervading pathos.

How much there was that his throne could not give him ! How much that even his religious qualities—his vivid spiritual insight, his strong spiritual yearnings, his large spiritual faith could not realise ! In spiritual vision and sympathy, in religious life and joy, his great sin notwithstanding, David was a man far before his age. But even his religious experience was insufficient as an antidote to the troubles and sorrows of life.

David on his throne fancies that in the solitude of a wilderness he might find rest. Let him but escape from the crowd of men, from the strife of tongues, from the shallowness or falseness of friendship, from the empty homage of courtiers, from the superficial ministry of wealth, and luxury, and power, and, perhaps, he would be at rest.

What a verdict it is upon the mere *things* that a man possesses ! David had won the best, and he sighs for a wilderness.

They are old, old words. David lived some three thousand years ago, in a world very different from ours ; but the expression of his yearning has become a proverb. His words are as fitly and fully the craving of our modern life ; no words are more frequently quoted for the utterance of modern feeling ; they would to-day give true expression to the consciousness of myriads. The wrongs, the failures, the sorrows, the despondencies of modern life are as strenuous as those of old Judea. Nay, more so ; for the more complex the life, the more speculative the experiment, the more highly wrought

the intensity, the greater the disappointment and prostration. Cares do not end for us any more than they did for David—the struggle is as strenuous, the failure as bitter, the desolateness as utter.

David wanted, he knew not what, only let him get away from life as it was. "Oh! that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest."

Precise as an echo is the modern note of weariness:—

"Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more."

Probably David did not analyse the sentiment as we do. It was simple impulsive feeling—the passionate sense of unsatisfactoriness. We, perhaps, see more clearly the limit of things. Human experience has taught us, Christ has told us, that the wish is wilful, unreasonable, futile. With David it was little more than a petulance; with us it is—what?

Clearly David's wish could not have been expressed by a disciple of Christ. It would have been impossible to a John or a Paul. Even in Patmos John could not have sighed out such a weary hopelessness of life. Even in Nero's prison Paul could not have prayed for himself that he might die. Even despondency does not in a Christian man take such forms. It is a sentiment outside the pale of Christian inspirations—a sentiment of the old dispensation rather than of the new. It was familiar enough to pagan life; such *tedium vitæ* was perverted into a doctrine of suicide:—

"Who may force the ill-pleased guest
To sit out his full time,
Or blame him if he goes?"

Christ, dear friends, has done something to transform

human feeling—to change, if not the experiences of life, yet the spirit with which we encounter them.

Let us then look, first, at this feeling of weariness in human life; and, next, at the contrasted sentiment and remedy proposed for it. There are many causes for this feeling of weariness in life.

There is the vague perplexing sense of manhood—the mystery of human life, of moral being, of freedom, responsibility; relationship to God, to one another, to the unseen, to the hereafter.

In a thousand ways these are a perplexity and burden of life; not in speculative thought merely—that were comparatively a light thing; and yet into what manifold infidelities and superstitions these mysteries of life have driven men! But in practical responsibilities and experiences of life, what a great and solemn and perplexing endowment is this gift of moral being—a nature so like to that of God, a character so different!—a relationship to God so vital, so constant and momentous in its responsibility, and yet so mysterious, so subtle, so unverifiable in many ways of proof; and, yet again, so potent in its influence upon our character, our doings, and our destiny!

Sometimes our baffled thought and aching heart almost urge the conviction that it were better to be less greatly endowed—better to be as the brute, contented with its fodder; as the bird, unconscious in its song. “They toil not, neither do they spin;” they neither think, nor aspire, nor feel remorse, nor disappointment.

This gift of moral life does carry with it tremendous responsibilities and issues—exercises of thought, of freedom to do right or wrong, of moral affections and duties, which shape character and determine eternal

destinies—well-nigh overwhelming in their responsibility and burden ; and especially with the vague and limited knowledge that we possess—mingled darkness and light—not so much a full revelation of God and of human life, as suggestions and general principles. God does not give us an exhaustive philosophy of life, or explicit rules of life. We are a law to ourselves ; we have our lives to shape and determine according to general principles that we can deduce, or that He lays down. If this moral nature of ours be the grandest, surely it is also the most sorrowful of God's gifts. If exercises of freedom be the noblest life, surely they are the most arduous.

All great gifts are sorrows. Indolent, animal, careless life is not the noblest type of being. The slave can be more jovial than his master ; the oxen that feed are freer from care than their owner. The tree of knowledge bears fruit of sorrow. No doubt a greater life will be wrought out by all this ; but, oh, the pangs of its travail !

Sometimes, therefore, we weary of the very burden of life—of its mystery, which we cannot fathom, of its responsibility, which we cannot evade. It does seem strange that beings so august, in a world so affluent, should live so restlessly, and wearily, and sadly.

Ay ! but this is the essential condition of all great life. Great responsibilities are bound only upon noble natures. Gifts of moral freedom are so noble that they are worth all the risks, all the disasters of failure. God might have made sin and sorrow impossible, but then He would have made a machine, and not a man.

The strength and blessedness of manhood are won only by the moral conflict and victory of free spiritual beings. We cannot be blithe as the lark, without care as the flower, because we belong to a nobler order of

being. And the burden grows with the generations. We cannot rest in an unchallenged, uninquiring faith as our fathers did. Ours is a larger heritage of knowledge and of thought. We see more, and we inquire more. There may not be less room for the foot of faith ; its place and path may not be narrower ; but its course is in a higher domain, its lights and voices are more spiritual, its range is freer, its attainments more difficult. And this higher condition of the great gift of moral life wearies us.

The endeavour to live *greatly* wearies us—to realise in a world so ignorant, and selfish, and evil, a life that is holy, godly, and noble. How keen and constant the sense of moral struggle, and how terrible the feeling of failure, or of shortcoming !

David, in his Judean world, felt this. He was striving after an ideal of life which he could not attain. He could not win the goal of perfect personal godliness. David was a pious man, a godly king ; he sought to do God's will, and to set up God's kingdom upon earth ; but he often and miserably failed. Like Paul, ten centuries after him, "He groaned, being burdened." Think of the force and fierceness of his temptations ! He, an Eastern king, was comparatively exempt from the restraints of ordinary men. Licence was tacitly accorded to him. Might he not, then, relax in religious strenuousness, indulge in self-gratifications, let things take their course ? Why should he be better than others ?

About every man temptations gather. Every man has the temptations of his qualities and of his circumstances. The very constitution of his human nature subjects him to temptation. Every possibility of holiness is a corresponding possibility of sin ; and the more

highly he is endowed with gifts of genius, of sensibility, of passion, the more susceptible of evil solicitations he will be ; the lower the scale of being, the lower the type of human being, the less its susceptibility to temptation. The sodden drunkard, whose brutal sense every open beerhouse solicits, is infinitely less terribly tempted than the man of lofty genius, of refined sensibilities—the poet, the artist, whose every fibre is finely strung, and who is accessible to solicitation through a thousand avenues of imagination and emotion. His very temperament makes him acutely sensitive to every touch.

I do not mean that there is one principle of responsibility for the man of genius and another for the stolid sensualist. I mean, only, that in moral estimates the measure of temptation and of individual susceptibility to it should count. We know the sin ; we may not know the temptation or the struggle against it, even in falling.

But, again, what a mystery of life it is that, endowed as we are, we are so capable of evil, so exposed to evil solicitations, so susceptible to evil impression !

And then when we fail ! The sense of having yielded to evil comes upon the noblest natures as an agony, an incipient hell. Their very sensitiveness torments them ; they suspect their very sincerity ; their affections reproach them ; they realise all the characteristics of their wrong ; and their hand trembles as it tries again to take hold upon God.

Thus David felt. His nature was fervid and imaginative—the finely strung temperament of the poet—and it exposed him to special temptations of passion. “Every man has the faults of his virtues,” and the sense of his great sin agonised David, as even the same sin could not have agonised inferior natures. And he was weary of the struggle, even to despondency—“Oh that I had

wings like a dove!" So men have fled from human life and its tempters as from devils, into monasteries and deserts, if thereby they might be delivered from evil.

Nay, spiritual aspiration itself wearies us—the simple effort to soar, to "rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things"—to attain to higher goodness, larger faith, a more dominant spiritual power. There is always pain in leaving our old selves behind. Repentance is always an anguish; new births are always travails; even in simple growth there is an ache.

When, for example, the environment, the chrysalis of an old creed, an old Church form, is broken, and is no longer tenable, what a sense of exposure there is, of rudderless drift, of disastrous helplessness; always an anxiety, often an anguish! The chick which has just broken its shell looks out upon a strange world. What distress Mary felt because the dead body of her Lord was not found in its sepulchre! I have sometimes thought that the soul just unclothed will feel strange even among the blessed dead. "Nothing," said the Duke of Wellington, "is so terrible as a great victory, except a great defeat." And this is specially true of spiritual victories; they are always won at a great cost.

And if we fail to win them, if the struggle, the hardly fought field, end in discomfiture! God only knows the strenuous agony of vanquished souls, the reluctant surrender of principle to passion, of weakness to circumstance, the shame of yielding virtue, the anguish of doing wrong—ay, even when to onlookers it seems the wanton indulgence of unresisted passion. The virtuous youth just surrendering to vicious temptation; the struggling tradesman succumbing to fraudulent expediency; the starving labourer first putting forth his hand to dishonesty; the agonised man or woman drowning sorrow

in intoxication ; the starving sempstress surrendering body and soul for bread—oh, the misery of the struggle ! Oh, the agony of the fall !

Such failure David knew ; it wrung from him the fifty-first psalm, the most pathetic wail that ever came from human heart.

And in sheer weariness of the strain, in utter disheartenment at the failure, some men simply give up all. And those who do not, lower their aim, relax their endeavour ; they relinquish all efforts to be heroes of religious life ; they accept commonplace routine, humdrum goodness ; they relinquish their ideals, the glorious vision fades, enthusiasm cools, and they become decent, self-complacent, stolid, worldly, religious people, such as our churches are full of.

Or if spiritual sensibilities be too vital for this, they sigh out their sense of disappointment, their weary feeling of the arduous conditions of achievement—"Oh wretched man that I am !" "Oh that I had wings like a dove !" "Oh for a life in which we could be good without such struggle and failure !"

The disappointments of religious work weary and dishearten us.

How inherent and persistent the evil of man ! How little even the strongest and most self-sacrificing can achieve ! What a disparity,—first, between the need and the service, the whitened field and the reapers ; and, next, between the sowing and the reaping, even where labour is bestowed ! How sad the moral aspect of the world to men of spiritual vision, who see beneath the surface of life, who can estimate moral processes and issues, whom experience has made wise !

From much of the world's misery we stand aloof ; much

of it we cannot know :—the ignorance, superstitions, and the brutal vices of heathen countries ; many of the occult forms and secret orgies of vice in our large cities, even in our villages. Much that we might do something to alleviate, our selfish sensibilities turn away from. If a wounded wayfarer lies in our path we pass by on the other side.

How “the whole creation groans and travails together in pain until now!” What mad passion, and cold-blooded sin, and unscrupulous contention, and mean selfishness, and helpless misery, and calculated goodness, and Pharisaic religiousness ! What cancerous vices, secretly poisoning the very life-blood of peoples ! What epidemics of lust, and drunkenness, and greed, and ambition, and false glory, and wicked war !—men taking no count of moral right or wrong ; simply of possibility, interest, and convenience.

And how little to counteract it even the strongest and best can do ! Something men and women have achieved—in ragged schools, and reformatories, and missions to the fallen, and temperance movements, and evangelising agencies, and philanthropic enterprises ; and now and then some prophet-like statesman will almost alone lift up his voice and try to stem the torrent of a nation’s mad passion. But, oh, the wave upon wave of evil, the hardness and the wilfulness, the brutality and the persistence, the utter insensibility to moral appeal—the parent defeating all helping efforts to save his child, the very penitent falling away again to his sin, goodness hardening into formal habit !

How weary the most strenuous worker becomes ! “Iniquity abounds,” and “the love of many waxes cold.” Elijah the only prophet of the Lord left. Athanasius against the world. Paul when “no man stood

with him." The divine Lord when His disciples left Him alone. "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" "Oh that I might die!"

And so, in manifold ways, our strength and faith are tried. God's processes are slow, and impatient zeal must learn to wait until they are finished—until the divine artist brings symmetry and beauty out of this unshapely and churlish block of humanity. How often we must believe Him right, without being able to prove that He is so—right even in His long forbearance with this struggling, suffering world of sinning men!

"As for God, His way is perfect." A strong confidence in this is one of the secrets of strength and restfulness. But it is sometimes too hard for us. In many things we are able to work in faith; it is not so easy to rest in faith while God is working. We do not always interpret the discord as "harmony ill understood." We cannot always confide in the Great Captain's ordering of the battle, in the Great Refiner's conduct of the furnace. Sometimes we fail to realise that He has a noble and loving purpose which He is bent upon realising, that He is near us in all true work, however lowly, and that, in the very nature of things, truth and goodness are immortal and divine. And so, both in striving and in waiting, we weary, and would "fain flee away and be at rest."

This in itself proves sufficiently that "this is not our rest." So this divine life of ours vindicates itself. The economy of our life is disturbed; our nature demands more than its conditions can supply. The salvation of Christ is simply a remedy for this condition of incongruity, a deliverance from the sin and sorrow of life, from wrong purpose and feeling, in both ourselves and others, from moral impurity and hardness, and selfishness and

unbelief. "The world is out of joint;" "darkness does cover the earth." "The law of sin" does work disastrously in human lives, and to counteract it, to deliver the world from it, "the strong Son of God" came. And yet, turning away from the lofty and radical spirituality of Christ's method, men still think that deliverance may be wrought in David's way, that some escape from the troubled conditions of life may be found, some wilderness to which the weary man may flee.

Can David's method achieve it? If the weary man had wings like a dove, were there a wilderness to which he could flee, would he be at rest? Nay, verily!

For the yearning is a purely selfish one. It is not a desire for rectifying the wrong, but solely for personal exemption from it. If gratified, the world would remain in its unredeemed evil—nay, it would be worse by the forsaking of the good. Such a method of selfish desire would have deterred the Christ from redeeming the world. Only in desponding moments would a good man indulge such a desire. It is the unreasoning impulse of blind passion; the selfish impulse of unsympathising feeling.

The true impulse even of a Moses, a David, an Elijah, much more of a Paul or a Christ, is to save the world by sacrificing himself for it. "If by any means I may save some." A Christ-like man will not take counsel of his own ease or happiness; least of all will he seek selfish escape from the sorrow and sin of aggregated, struggling human life—whether by closing his ears and eyes against it, or by getting away to his "quiet place in the country," so as to limit his contact with it to the necessary relations of business. The consecration of his divine Lord will be his instinct and impulse. He will

seek out the sin, and the struggle, and the misery, if, haply, he may save.

To flee into the wilderness would not realise the craving for rest, because a man carries with him his chief unrest. Moral dissatisfactions are as great in the wilderness as in the city; his mystic moral nature yearns and strives. He might leave the sin and the strife; but can he so forget them as to be indifferent to them? Not until his own moral sensibilities are dulled and depraved. The thought of the sorrowful world urging its claims for sympathy and succour would be ever intruding and disturbing his selfish complacency. It is not in the conditions around a man that the unrest is; it is in the heart within him. Monasteries have not always shut out worldliness, or subdued evil passion, or disabled temptation. Is any delusion greater than that better circumstances would make us better men? The least element of temptation lies in circumstance; its strength is in desire. He who is not spiritual in the worst circumstances would be unspiritual in the best. "Ah, but if I were only otherwise circumstanced!" It is the weak illusion of sinning men. Something in circumstance there is, sometimes much. But circumstance never determines manhood. A man is fundamentally what his own moral nature is. The dream of ideal circumstance is the paradise of fools.

Then, in the wilderness, the man would be deprived of the highest conditions of self-development.

No gift or faculty keeps its virtue unused. Let a man bury his talent in the earth, not only does he fail to use it, but itself deteriorates. The rust corrodes it, it is damaged and depreciated, so that it is intrinsically worthless. The sword rusts in the scabbard; the gold corrodes in its coffer; works of art deteriorate in their

cases ; eloquence dies upon unpractised lips ; benevolence contracts in hearts not exercised therewith.

Moral qualities, especially, are developed and perfected only by constant exercise ; faith by acts of trust ; love by exercises of affection ; patience by endeavours to endure. I do not think that I could long maintain my belief in any of the great Christian doctrines if I did not frequently put them to the tests of practical religious life. The Fatherhood of God ; the incarnation of the Christ ; His atonement for sin ; His quickenings of spiritual life ; His resurrection from the dead, are made certain to me by their uses in the necessities of my life ; by the vital moral power that they have to solve great problems of being ; to create new life ; to inspire holiness ; to give strength ; to minister comfort.

In these days especially, when intellect questions all things with a keenness and a persistency of which the "ages of faith" knew nothing, the question of questions is, How am I to keep my hold upon Christ ? For myself, I confess that mere intellectual reasonings do but little for me. If I do keep a firm hold upon God and Christ, it is simply by filling my heart and life with their religious inspirations—proving their moral force, how much to my practical life they can be.

Only, therefore, in conditions of activity and conflict, of temptation and suffering, can spiritual life itself be fully developed. We prove light by seeing, and life by living, and strength and love and joy by divine inspirations of them. The sinews of the soul are made strong by wrestling. A man whose life is sequestered and easy, who knows no great fears and agonies, struggles through no Slough of Despond, does not agonize to enter the Wicket Gate, has no fight with Apollyon in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, climbs no Hill Difficulty, enters

no Doubting Castle, must, in spiritual things, be a nerveless weakling. To peevishly wish the struggle over, to try in cowardly selfishness to evade it, to whine for a wilderness of sequestered rest, is a blunder and an ignominy, a moral imbecility, a sickness, sometimes a very suicide of spiritual life. "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

No! David's solution of life's struggle and sorrow was ignoble and false. God mercifully made it an impossibility for his servant. It would have made him a Sybarite, an imbecile, a psalm-singing, bead-counting coward and traitor, a religious sentimentalist and diletante, utterly incapacitated for doing the strong, rough, self-sacrificing work that God's purposes demand in a world like this.

How utterly contrasted Christ's way of rest! I need not enlarge upon it. It is our common preaching. Could I urge it more cogently than by thus demonstrating the insufficiency of other ways? We are shut up to Christ. A word or two may suffice.

"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world." "Not as the world giveth give I unto you." "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." How? Christ promises no wilderness to which we may flee. He never sequesters weak souls from strong duties, or fierce temptations, or bitter sorrows. Rather let these come in all their fierceness. He will make the soul itself strong to overcome them; He will not take away the thorn in the flesh; His grace shall be sufficient for us. He deals with the sickly soul as the physician with the sickly body, fitting it for roughest experiences of life; as his trainer deals with the athlete; as the commander deals with his soldiers;

He makes it strong by exposure. "In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but in Me ye shall have peace."

"I will give you rest." What rest? The rest of inward purity and moral strength ; the rest of health, as opposed to the feverish disquiet of sickness ; the rest of strong victory, contrasted with the trepidation of cunning evasion or ignominious defeat : so that the duty that to weakness was so arduous and terrible becomes easy to invigorated strength ; the temptation that to impure passion or tepid religious affection was so strenuous is no temptation at all to holy enthusiasm and spiritual yearning.

Yea, "more than conquerors"—stronger men for having fought, holier men for having suffered, more grateful, loving, and trusting, for help given and salvation wrought !

Dear friends, how we mistake the comfortings of God ! We think of Him as taking us to His bosom as to a shelter, covering us as with His wing, which the hostile arrow must pierce before it can harm us, speaking soothing words, quieting perturbed feelings—the caress, the assurance, the tender sentiment and sympathy of the Father's heart.

All this there may be and is ; but God has greater ways of comfort than these—sterner, it may be, but more effectual. Tender mercies He always has, but often ministered in rough ways. "As the eagle stirreth up her nest," forces her young out of its shelter, compels them to fly or to perish, so the wise Father in Heaven forces us out of our puling sentiment and passive security. Not by caresses of tenderness does He comfort us, but by goads of impulse ; by necessities for self-help and preservation ; by tearing away the Nessus shirt that burns ; by casting out the demons that tor-

ment ; by cutting out the cancer that consumes—sharp caustic methods of restoring health, of developing strength. “Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

If, then, you seek rest, do not think of the wilderness—mere quiet of place, selfish evasion. The most terrible thing that could befall you would be to find rest thus. Come to Jesus Christ, seek His healing for your soul—a heart quickened with His strong life, fervent with His great love, a heart at rest in virtue of its own harmony and strength. “The mind is its own place.” Wherever we go, we carry with us our own Heaven or Hell.

Would you have God comfort you? For your fear and weakness and sorrow He has tender words: “As one whom his mother comforteth ;” “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him, for He knoweth our frame ; He remembereth that we are but dust.”

But this, only when we are too weak, or sorrowful, or peevish for any other treatment. Ask Him, then, not for His soothing, but for His strengthening, His “healing grief, His conquering power.”

“O comforter of God’s redeemed!
Whom the world does not see,
What hand should pluck me from the flood
That casts my soul on thee?
Who would not suffer pain like mine,
To be consoled like me?”

“When I am feeble as a child,
And flesh and heart give way,
Then on Thine everlasting strength
With passive trust I stay.
And the rough wind becomes a song,
And darkness shines like day.”

OUR FATHER.

OUR FATHER.

"After this manner pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven."—
MATTHEW VI. 9.

THE simple prayer, of which these are the first words, has had a wonderful history.

Its first teaching was an epoch in the religious development of men. It was the inspiration of a new sentiment towards God. It changed the entire feeling of prayer. It was the embodiment, in a devotional form and for practical use, of the great revelation of God's Fatherhood; which was the supreme teaching of our Lord's ministry. The history of the prayer gathers into itself the best things of human life; and, alas! also some of the worst. The holiest human aspirations and the deadliest human superstitions have alike gathered round the Lord's Prayer. The best things are proverbially capable of the greatest abuse; therefore, the Lord's Prayer has been perverted to the deadliest of religious misuses. Intended as a teaching against "vain repetitions," it has been used as the vainest of all repetitions, the most mechanical of all formulas. Its very devotional value has been appraised by its numerical repetition. Intended to gather all children of the one great Father in a common filial recognition of Him, and of their brotherhood in Him, it has been used as the badge of a party, the shibboleth of a sect.

So far, its history is a sad illustration of the possibilities of our poor, blind, selfish, passionate nature. In our very prayers we may become "like the heathen." For what is heathenish prayer but heaping up meaningless words, repeating paternosters, coming to God with much speaking and little meaning?

But intelligently and devoutly used, how glorious a prayer it is! We call it "the Lord's Prayer"; not because Jesus Himself used it in His devotions, but because He embodied in it His teaching of the true spirit of prayer. "After this manner pray ye." It is the prayer which He, the elder brother, puts into our lips when we kneel before the great Father. He gives us the epithets that we are to apply to Him; teaches us the petitions that we are to ask of Him. All the feelings that constitute piety enter into this simple designation, "Our Father." All the cries that go up from earth to heaven are represented in these simple petitions. Everything that it has been in man's heart to ask since he first lifted up his hand to God, is herein contained—gathered into words so simple that a child may use them, and yet laden with a fulness so ample that the largest experiences of life cannot exhaust them; transparent to the simplest praying soul, full of unfathomed meanings to even the loftiest and most spiritual.

For two thousand years men have prayed this prayer; often, alas! in vainest repetition—more often still, let us hope, as the utterance of sincerest, seeking souls. What a record it has! What lips have uttered it! What experiences of life have found expression in it! What scenes of life it has hallowed! From what strange places its words have gone up! The little child at its mother's knee—the first words of prayer it is

taught ; the hoary man upon his death-bed—the last accents that tremble upon his lips ; men in necessity and peril, in shipwrecks, in dungeons—their sin nearing its retribution, their righteousness its martyrdom ; men on fields of battle, in lions' dens, in burning fiery furnaces, in lonely garrets, at domestic altars, in crowded churches, in deserts, caves, and catacombs. Where is the Christian soil, where are the Christian lips that at some time or other have not sent up the prayer, often in an agony, "Our Father which art in heaven" ?

If spiritual battlefields could have their memorials, how monumental this prayer would be ! Other memorials impress us—the obelisks of Egypt, upon which Abraham, Joseph, and Moses gazed ; the Nineveh sculptures which Sennacherib carved ; the temples of Thebes, in which men older than the patriarchs worshipped ; the catacombs of Rome, in which the early Christians hid themselves ; the Coliseum, in which they were martyred. What scenes of life these represent ! What historic tragedies they help us to imagine ! Life, in its ferment, and crisis, and change ; generations succeeding each other for three thousand years.

These, however, are but dumb unconscious monuments of what has gone on around them—mere tombstones over the graves of the dead. The Lord's Prayer has entered into myriads of lives, and of living experiences ; each heart has taken it up into itself, and made it part of its own thinking and feeling. Yearning, sinful, agonizing souls have cooled their fever by it, expressed in it their desire, whispered their confidence in its words, and found in its suggestions their peace or they have put into it their wild passionate feelings, and sent it up to God.

A short, simple, unchanging formula, it remains,

while all perversions of it change and fail, uniting all men's hearts and meeting all their needs. Men become sceptical, sinful, irreligious ; none willingly part from the Lord's Prayer. The history of the Bible may go, its doctrines be disbelieved, its precepts disregarded ; the Lord's Prayer is the one precious thing that men save out of the wreck of their faith. Strive as it may, no sect monopolizes it ; it is part of every ritual, the domestic liturgy of every household, enshrining family pieties and Sabbath memories. We feel it to be divine, not merely because of the divine lips that taught it, but because so many divine feelings are quickened by it. Its beautiful catholicity gathers all hearts, its simple piety touches all feelings, and sanctifies all experiences. It is the model prayer of the new kingdom of Heaven ; a formula for its religious membership, the keynote to which all the music of Christian worship must be attuned.

My more special purpose, however, is to emphasize the simple and beautiful conception of God with which the prayer opens, and upon which it is based.

"Our Father." Not perhaps so wonderful to us, who, through the after-teachings of Christianity have been made so familiar with it, but surely very wonderful to these newly gathered disciples, who had its condescension and its tenderness yet to learn.

It is the key-note of the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed of the entire ministry of our Lord ; it was His one great distinctive conception and designation of God. All His discourses are inlaid with it. The great phrase, "Your Father who is in Heaven," rings, like a refrain, through them all. It is the burden of His entire revelation of God ; the announcement of an unsuspected

relationship ; a new portal through which all must enter the Christian temple, and come to the feet and heart of God.

When Oliver Wendell Holmes was asked concerning his theological creed, he simply replied, "The first words of the Paternoster." Hardly could a broader and deeper answer be given.

Some of you may remember Carlyle's pathetic letter to Thomas Erskine. "'Our Father who art in heaven : hallowed be Thy name. Thy will be done.' What else can we say ? The other night, in my sleepless tossings about, which were growing more and more miserable, these words—that brief and grand prayer—came strongly into my mind with an altogether new emphasis, as if written and shining for me, in mild, pure splendour, on the black bosom of the night there. When I, as it were, read them word by word, with a sudden check to my imperfect wanderings, with a sudden softness of composure, which was much unexpected. Not for perhaps thirty or forty years had I once formally repeated that prayer ; nay, I never felt before how intensely the voice of a man's soul it is, the inmost aspiration of all that is high and pious in poor human nature ; right worthy to be commended with an 'After this manner pray ye.'"

Let us then, first, distinctly note it as a word of filial conception, confidence, and love—the first great word of perfect sympathy and trust in our Christian devotional teaching.

Ideas have imperial power in moulding and attempering religious feeling. Prayer, especially, depends upon theological conceptions. It is cold or fervent, fearful or confident, as I think Him to be to whom I pray. Is He too great to care for me, too holy to

→ sympathize with me? Or is He stern and retributive, angry with my sin, and unwilling to forgive it? Or is He harsh in His dealings, un pitying, capricious, cruelly afflicting or coldly bereaving me?

If He be such I cannot pray to Him; I may cry to Him in a great distress, as I might cry to a passing stranger, or even to an enemy—cry in deprecation, or for help which He may or may not render. But in the large and true sense of prayer I cannot commune with Him, impart confidences to Him, approach Him with uncalculating, unapprehensive love, so as to cast myself upon His bosom, utter all my thoughts to Him as my loving Father. All the large meaning of prayer is lost to me; it is reduced to a mere random cry of need, or to a trembling deprecation.

The teaching of the divine Master is, that I come to God as a son to his father.

Is there anything more difficult to realize? Our deepest human instinct is to yearn for God; our human consciousness of dependence, weakness, incompleteness craves a Deity; our spiritual instinct "cries out for the living God." We can explain this no more than we can explain the craving of a child for its mother. We are insufficient for ourselves; we yearn for some one—almighty, wise, and good; not for mere things of life, but for some one to whom life itself can cling, who shall be with us in love and help for evermore.

This strange universe of things terrifies us as we feel our relations to it; our heart yearns for one who shall give all things that come, and abide when all things are gone. Augustine's great cry is endorsed by every experience: "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we cannot rest until we find rest in Thee."

OUR FATHER.

And man has no difficulty so great as to conceive of the great Being for whom he craves.

With what strange symbols of the Deity the religions of the world have been emblazoned,—from blocks of wood and stone, to solar myths and fantastic symbols of sun and sky! How men have pondered and striven to find the true idea of God! The Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Zeus, the Roman Jupiter were the highest conceptions of pagan imagination. Was it this sense of inadequate imagination, of baffled aspiration, that led the Athenians to build an altar to "The Unknown God"? Plato never conceived the idea of God set forth by Jesus Christ. Judaism never attained to it. Its most spiritual psalmists and prophets did get glimpses of His mercifulness and tenderness, and even called Him "Father," but only very vaguely and distantly. Jesus Christ for the first time fully and distinctly revealed Him. To Him we owe the great spiritual and essential conception which has changed the religious feeling of the world.

Even the most spiritual of His disciples fall short of its full recognition, often fail of it altogether.

Is it not, then, a great thing to be taught to say in our daily prayers, "Our Father who art in heaven"? For if our theology inspires our prayers, our devotional experiences modify our theology. I cannot form a hard conception of Him whom I have learned to designate so tenderly. We come to think of God as // our Father when we are constantly calling Him so.

Our Christian life falls short of this recognition. What terrible conceptions of God have been embodied in theological creeds, made the themes of evangelical sermons, the inspirations of filial prayers! The idea of

God's Fatherhood, in its ineffable grace and tenderness, is of slow growth in Christian Churches and in individual souls. It is a long time before even Christian hearts understand and feel its great meanings. How we permit the idea of God's kingliness, His authority as a ruler, the sovereignty of His decrees, His righteousness as a judge who "administers justice and maintains truth," to overpower, if not to suppress, the idea of a tender Father, yearning with desire and urgent with blessing!

Of course, these are true conceptions. God is a righteous judge, who will by no means clear the guilty. God is an almighty king, to whom all power belongs. He is an absolute sovereign, who doeth "as He will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." But these recognitions are not the inspirations of Christian prayer. They are thoughts of God to alarm a sinful man, or to assure a righteous man. Other thoughts are needed to kindle the confidence and to excite the rapture of filial hearts. And these are of slow and gradual growth. Sometimes a gifted seer will loudly proclaim them; but the recognition so transports him that it becomes partial and exclusive in his teaching. Extremes generate each other. Because the love of God has been imperfectly represented, God is set forth as if righteousness and retribution were no part of His love; and the moral sense recoils; so that the teaching of God's Fatherhood has not made the progress that it otherwise would. Nothing discredits truth more than false or partial arguments in its support.

The older theology of even the modern Church was much sterner than the theology of our own day. Every change has tended to a softening of hard conceptions of

God, and is, I think, the working of a true feeling that resents such. Our fathers did not realize the love, the compass, the tenderness of God's Fatherhood. What terrible conceptions of God we find in the traditional theology of the Churches !

Our modern family life is more tender and confidential than family life was formerly. A son does not now call his father "Sir." The father is more a father, less a magistrate. Households are ruled more by affection, less by authority.

So in the government of nations ; there has been a general advance from the old tyranny of absolutism and force to modern constitutional liberty. In every department of life there is less of arbitrary law, and more of moral influence. Men are ruled more through their moral sympathies, less through their fears and necessities. Law is revered because it is right, not merely because it is strong. Penalties are less sanguinary ; punishments are less brutal.

So the brotherhood of classes has grown more intimate and helpful ; religious sentiment is calling into existence new affinities of life. Men feel, more than they did, that they are "members one of another." All men, that is, families, social circles, Churches, nations, have been advancing in enlightenment, refinement, and sympathy, as the leaven of Christianity has wrought. Each age has been nobler in feeling than the age that preceded it. The religion of Jesus Christ has more and more taken possession of men's thought and imbued their heart. Gradually and surely it has driven out of the family, and out of social life brute force, hard law, and selfish prerogative ; and has infused gracious sympathies, feelings of human and Christian brotherhood. Both in the home and in the Church we have learned

that "One is our Father, even God, and all we are brethren."

Necessarily, therefore, our conceptions of God's Fatherhood have developed ; they are higher, broader, more tender than they were.

Have we in this impaired our sense of God's righteousness ? God forbid ! We better understand His love. Are we not beginning to understand that the most sacred and inviolable sanctions of righteousness are those which love engenders ? No righteousness is so strongly guarded as that which love guards. The loving heart of a son guards the righteousness of a father as no mere authority, or fear, or sense of right could guard it. So that, instead of weakening the sense of divine holiness, the growing recognition of God's Fatherhood incalculably strengthens it. Fear of punishment is not the greatest moral force. Love of right, love of Him who is right, is infinitely greater. The most orderly communities are those that are the freest. Law in England is respected more than law in Russia, or in Turkey. No fear that you loosen the sanctions of righteousness by augmenting the tender feeling of God's Fatherhood. As with children in a father's house, there is in our obedience less of awe, less of coercion—more of confidence, freedom, and love.

And this will still go on. "Law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Christianity has but little precept ; it quickens and develops life. The spiritual man becomes a law unto himself. This is the function of all law. As therefore each succeeding age of the Church surpasses its predecessor in spiritual perception and feeling, it will understand more and more of God's Fatherhood—"What is the breadth, and length, and

depth, and height of the love of God, which passeth knowledge."

Of all our relationships the parental relationship is the highest and most inclusive. It is the sovereign, the magistrate, the father all in one, and each in its highest realization.

We can therefore have no difficulty in understanding the character, the duty, and the privilege involved in this relationship.

We cannot mistake the character to be recognized in the divine Father, or the character to be maintained in us His children.

In a very profound sense God is the Father of every moral being; not the Creator merely, as He is the Creator of the material universe, but the Father. He breathed into the physical organism that He had made, and "man became a living soul"—an emanation of His own essential being, a "partaker of the divine nature." "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." However we may sin, lose holy feeling and character, we can no more destroy the radical relationship to God of our spiritual nature than the alienated affections of the prodigal could destroy his natural relationship to his father. There is an essential oneness of nature in God and in all moral beings. Thus moral qualities and affections in God are the same as moral qualities and affections in man. It is not untrue or irreverent to say, "There is much of human nature in God"; it is only saying, "There is much of the divine nature in man." Only thus can spiritual intercourse with God be possible.

In a very vivid way the incarnation of Christ enables us to realize our relationship. He, the human child of

OUR FATHER.

Divine Father, is the ideal man, a type of what every man should be, "a kind of firstfruits" of what man will become.

It was this divine kinship with humanity that caused the special anguish of His passion. He had done no sin. He had no consciousness of personal guilt. He could not feel the sinner's hell. He knew that "the Father loved Him because He laid down His life for the sheep." But He was the human brother of the men who had sinned, and His anguish was caused by His vivid realization of what their sin was. It was the feeling of a pure, lofty-minded man, whose brother has committed a murder, whose sister has fallen into unspeakable shame; a sorrow over the moral ruin of those dear to us; an anguish greater than that of the wrong-doer himself, because that of a purer nature. So, amid all diversities of human character, we realize that we are common children of the heavenly Father.

Sin is not the destruction of the essential filial relationship itself. It is the suspension and alienation of its affections, leading to evil doing. Christ restores these alienated affections, gives to "as many as believe on His name power to become sons of God." Through the forgiveness of the divine Father, through the quickenings of the divine Spirit, the feeling, the character, the privileges of sons are restored to us. Just as when the prodigal "came to himself" and was forgiven of his father, he was restored to the filial privileges of his father's house. The alienated feeling is so strong, the spiritual insensibility is so great, that it is no exaggeration when, in the strong metaphorical language of Scripture, it is spoken of as "dead in trespasses and sins"; and our restoration to right feeling as "a new birth." Sometimes the re-

presentation that we are "dead in trespasses and sins" is taken so literally as to affirm our absolute inability to love and serve God; but this were absolutely to release us from all moral responsibility. There is no responsibility in death. If I say that "I cannot serve God" in the sense that I have no vital power to do so in the very condition of my being, clearly I am not responsible. If I say, "I cannot serve God" in the sense that I am unwilling, that my affections are alienated—just as I might say of a liar, "He cannot speak the truth," or of a miser, "He cannot do a generous thing"—then the responsibility remains. I could love God; I could be holy were I so inclined. My disinclination is my guilt.

It is the special recognition and privilege of spiritual men that they realize God's Fatherhood in much more than in the natural relationship of moral creatures. It is not of the creaturely relationship; it is of the spiritual feeling—the sympathy, the love, the fellowship, the privileges—that I think when I say, "Our Father which art in heaven."

And what a broad and noble relationship it is! Pertaining to all who are quickened into spiritual life, restricted to no one class of spiritual character, limited to no degree of spiritual grace. There are no degrees in sonship, only in the grace and growth of sonship. The least advanced is as truly a son as the most mature—the penitent thief upon his cross, as the saintly Paul in his Roman prison. And the loving Father looks as tenderly upon the newly-born babes of the Spirit as upon His stalwart sons.

The obvious duty of the relationship is that we obey the divine Father, and perfect our moral likeness to Him. "If I be a Father, where is my honour?"

The instinctive, ineradicable love of a child—imitative, delicate, constraining, free—is the type of our love to the Father in Heaven. Without this the very relationship is inconceivable. Every conception of hard duty, of calculated service, is precluded. As a son in the Father's house, I love and serve in all freedom of the spirit, with the spontaneous inspirations and fervours of rejoicing affection. A true and tender child, my achievement is my joy, my failure my sorrow. I am as filial and trusting in my penitence as in my highest obedience.

The inclusive privilege of the relationship is confidence, communion, assurance; the sense of God's loving Fatherhood so perfect, that we neither speculate nor think about it. We unconsciously realize it, and "live, and move, and have our being" in it. Our entire life, in all its joys and sorrows, its difficulties and cares, its necessities and prayers, moves in the atmosphere of God's Fatherhood.

→ By the very designation God would teach us the fidelity and tenderness of His love. We are to conceive of the divine Fatherhood by our human fatherhood. He takes that which is holiest, tenderest, and most inviolable in our human relationships, and transfigures and idealizes it. By calling Himself our Father, He appeals to that ineffable nearness, tenderness, and depth of human feeling which the relationship represents. Our wrong-doing grieves the heart of a Father; our well-being excites the interest of a Father; our perils awaken a Father's anxieties; our necessities elicit a Father's bountifulness; our achievements inspire a Father's gladness. "God dealeth with us as with sons." What a wonderful feeling of life is gathered into the designation!

And as sons we have a title to the inheritance. "The Father's house" is more than a promise, a guerdon, a bequest; it is an inheritance. "If children, then heirs." "Now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be"; but we are "begotten again to a living hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in Heaven for us."

But, primarily, the representation is intended to inspire and attemper our prayer. Not to a majestic Elohim, an inscrutable Jehovah, a stern arbiter of good and evil, of life and death, do we pray, but to a yearning loving Father. He does not stoop over us in kingly condescension; He bends over us in tender affection—His fatherly heart full of yearnings, and pityings, and loving purposes—more eager to bless than we to ask His blessing; not needing to be pleaded with, or persuaded, but watching for occasion, "waiting to be gracious": not exacting or reluctant, but seeking excuse for blessing: not making the worst, but the best of us—glad to cover up our faults, to "remember our iniquities no more," full of the graciousness and bountifulness of a tender Father, to whom we may freely take all our difficulties and sorrows, and from whom we may confidently ask "grace to help us in every time of need."

Our prayers, therefore, are not affirmations of theological notions about God; they are the outgushing feelings of the heart of a child spoken to the heart of a father—the utterance of all its tenderness and yearning, its want and fear, its hope and joy, its penitence for sin, its gratitude for mercy. We open our hearts to the loving Father as the infant opens its hungry lips to the mother whose nourishment is its life. "Yea, a mother may forget her sucking child,

that she should not have compassion upon the fruit of her womb; yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee." He will "supply all our need out of the riches of His fulness in Christ Jesus."

Dear friends, a prayer such as this is a mighty force in our lives, and should greatly inspire them.


For instance; how the thought of the divine Fatherhood should act upon our own! If we would create in our children a high and holy conception of God's Fatherhood, how rich and holy our own fatherhood should be! Alas for children who have no fathers through whom they can image the great Father; who think of their fathers with shame; to whom this very word of the Lord's Prayer is a suggestion of sorrows! God intends our children to understand the goodness, love, and tenderness of His Fatherhood through our own. What manner of fathers ought we to be? We are in the place of God to our children. How are we teaching them to conceive of Him?

What a broad catholicity of human brotherhood it inculcates! How it rebukes all religious selfishness, all sectarian exclusiveness and animosity, all Pharisaic pride and prerogative! I have no monopoly of the Father's love. Other children He has not of my domicile, other sheep not of my fold. Of such, even though personally unknown to me, I am compelled to think. My Christian charities are unconsciously enlarged and intensified by the very form of my prayer. At the feet of the Father, when my feeling is most subdued and impressionable, when my heart is most fluid, when the most conscious of need myself, my selfishness and pride are disabled. I realize my human brotherhood by using this term of large recognition. By calling my

{ Father "Our Father," I am enlarging my thought and my sympathies.

Every disciple of Christ is invited to God by this prayer. It assures him of a loving welcome, of a relationship infinitely tender and strong, that is more than all the imperfections of our life, and that is their great corrective.

Can we wrong God's Fatherhood more than by fear-
ing to return to Him, fearing to pray to Him, fearing to
trust Him? Prodigals we may be; orphans we cannot
be. And there is no prodigal, however far and long he
may have wandered in the far country, however riotous
his living may have been, whom, if he penitently return,
the Father will not run forth to meet, stop his con-
fessions with the kisses of His love, and kill for him the
fatted calf.



PAUL'S PASSION FOR CHRIST.

PAUL'S PASSION FOR CHRIST.

"For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died: and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again."—2 CORINTHIANS V. 13-15.

TO the men of his generation the Christian apostleship of Paul was a great paradox. Amongst his fellow-apostles he stood pre-eminent in intellectual greatness, in varied learning, in Pharisaic reputation, in intensity of religious passion, and in the practical energy and daring with which he propagated Christianity. The antagonism that he provoked is a measure of his power. Few men in human history have excited more surprise, or provoked so much denunciation, sarcasm, and hatred. No animosities are so bitter as religious animosities; just because no interests are so sacred, no issues so momentous. All followers of the Nazarene fanaticism provoked scorn or hatred from both Jew and Greek. But concerning no one of the apostles—Peter, James, or John—do we find records of such contempt and resentment as concerning Paul. His letters abound in references to the inimical estimates of him that men formed. Either he was more sensitive than his brethren and more acutely felt his social ostracism, or there was in his character or in his apostolate something that made his Christian advocacy more anomalous and provocative

than that of the other apostles. The historian of the Acts of the Apostles, in his records of Paul, confirms the expressions of Paul's own letters. Festus, for instance, is represented as unable to restrain himself even upon the judgment-seat, and in the presence of King Agrippa; he breaks in upon what to us reads as a well-reasoned defence, and which, indeed, greatly moved Agrippa himself, with something like passionate impatience—"Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad." To which, with characteristic calmness and cogency, Paul simply replies that this account of his personal conversion, and of the great facts and ideas which caused it, was strictly "words of truth and soberness." Again and again he speaks of the animosities excited against him. "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." "We are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things." And—with a more general reference to the Christianity which he preached—"The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God." "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;" "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Most of these expressions occur in his letters to Gentile Churches—mostly to the church at Corinth; as if to Gentile philosophy Christianity was specially obnoxious.

One can understand the feeling excited in the Jews by this Nazarene heresy, and by the conversion to it of a prominent Pharisee and an orthodox champion of great gifts and great zeal, such as Saul of Tarsus. It has its analogies in the feeling sometimes shown by Romanists towards Protestants, and by Anglicans towards Nonconformists. But here is the estimate of Christianity, and of its ablest apostle formed by Grecian philosophers, looking at it from a purely intellectual standpoint. To the Jew,

Christianity, theologically estimated, was a stumbling-block ; to the Greek, Christianity, philosophically estimated, was foolishness. So that when they saw a strong thinker, and a great scholar, like Saul of Tarsus, become an enthusiastic convert to it and a fervid preacher of it, sacrificing for it all the secular and social and religious interests of life, they could only sarcastically say of him—"He is mad !" I need not point out the modern parallels to this attitude—the contempt that so-called philosophy often expresses towards what it deems the ignorance and superstition of Christian belief : as a lofty ethical teaching, Christianity is all very well, but as a supernatural revelation, as an expiatory sacrifice for human sin, it is fanatical foolishness.

It is worth while, in the light of Paul's experiences, to look at this. What is it in Christianity which, while it excites a transcendent enthusiasm in men like Paul, excites a corresponding contempt in men like the philosophers of Greece ? Here is a gifted Jew, a prominent Pharisee, an eminently religious man, who, in the fidelity and fervour of his religious zeal, had signalized himself as an eager and relentless persecutor of these fanatical Nazarenes. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem ; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished then oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." But in the very culmination of his persecuting passion, in the prosecution of a special and surpassing enterprise, where every indication is of the most determined and intensified hostility, in a single hour, this

man is converted. Journeying with his persecuting band, he is convinced of the divine truth of the extraordinary preaching and mission of this Nazarene peasant; the sword drops from his hand, and, surrounded by his followers, he falls prostrate to the earth, and prays—as to God—to the crucified Jesus, whose followers he was seeking to exterminate. Forthwith he seeks Ananias in Damascus, and sacrifices for Christ his great position as a Pharisee, his reputation for intelligence and consistency, his home enjoyments, and his brilliant prospects. “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.”


Try to imagine this brilliant disciple of Gamaliel a mendicant preacher of this pestilent heresy, the disciple of a crucified blasphemer, the apostle of a sect that was “everywhere spoken against.” He travels from country to country, only to exchange the resentful hatred of the Jew for the sarcastic contempt of the Gentile; nowhere finding predisposition whereon to engraft his teaching; encountering every form of popular hostility; “knowing that everywhere bonds and imprisonments await me;” “in deaths oft.” He was denounced as a traitor, scorned as a fanatical fool. His apostleship was an inexplicable paradox, outside the pale of rational debate. Men could not understand either the philosophy or the enthusiasm of his religious faith.

How does he vindicate himself? He affirms the intrinsic reasonableness, the spiritual truth, and the constraining force of his Christian teaching. He was so consecrated and enthusiastic in his apostleship,

because in the Christ he recognised such transcendent truth and inspiration. No doubt the ardour of a convert was enkindled in him. Never did man undergo a more wonderful revolution of conviction and feeling. The notions that he had ridiculed as fanatical and persecuted as blasphemous, he now saw to be "the power and the wisdom of God;" the teachings which he had heard from the lips of Stephen, and for which he had "consented to his death," were demonstrably true; the Christians whom he had persecuted as enemies of religion were "servants of the most high God." Amazed, and confounded by the demonstration, he fell prostrate before the Jesus whom he had persecuted, calling Him "Lord," and humbly asking, "What wilt thou have me to do?" It must have been a process and paroxysm of intensest feeling; and, under the inspiration of its conviction and remorse, he preached the faith that he had once destroyed. He is only a supreme instance of all true Christian discipleship. Every converted man comes under this special constraint, and, more or less, lives under its inspirations.

What is it? What is it in Christianity that, on the one hand, makes it so inscrutable to those who do not experience it, and, on the other, so intense and resistless to those who do? Is it merely a change of theological notions—a belief in the spiritual, as opposed to the materialism of sceptical philosophy? Saul, the Jewish Pharisee, receiving Christ and Christianity? This it is: true theological ideas do determine the strength and inspiration of all religious discipleship. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" But a great deal more than right notion is essential to such inspiration. Many a man avows a Christian creed who is utterly irresponsive to Christian

inspirations. Paul distinguishes qualities in men themselves. "The natural man," he tells us, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Hence the first essential to Christian discipleship is spiritual life—the quickening of dormant and inimical spiritual affections—so that the man who was "dead in trespasses and sins" is, as it were, born to a new life of holy sympathies and desires. Christ not only teaches, He quickens.



Then there are in religious ideas themselves different degrees of inspiring power. Every true man is influenced in feeling and in conduct by his notions. The Buddhist is, the Jew is, the Mohammedan is, the moral philosopher is, the politician is, the social reformer is. Think, then, of the distinctive character of Christian ideas, the moral grandeur of the Christian conception of God, the transcendency of the moral teaching of Christianity, its peculiar inspirations of personal and grateful love. The Holy Spirit, so to speak, has mightier moral forces to work with. He "takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us ;" produces within us sympathies, affections, and motives, corresponding to the greatness of these teachings. And, under their inspiration, Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the Apostle ; more intense in his Christian propaganda than in the exceeding madness of his Jewish persecution. The moral transformations of Christianity have no parallel. Under its converting power the drunkard becomes the apostle of temperance, the blasphemer prays, the sensual becomes spiritual, the man becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus." "Old things pass away, all things become new."

The Apostle affirms that the distinctive inspiration

of his passionate fervour and entire consecration is the person and mission of Jesus Christ—"the love of Christ constraineth us." It is distinctively love for a person—"the truth is in Jesus." Everything in Christianity centres in Christ's person. Christian doctrines are simply explanations of the facts of Christ's personal history; so that Jesus Christ Himself is the personal and exclusive object of our religious trust and love. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In this Christianity is unique. Take Moses away, Judaism remains unimpaired; Moses was merely a prophet proclaiming it. Moses, therefore, involved none of its essential characteristics; inspired no sense of personal obligation and love. Take Christ away, Christianity disappears. His acts as a personal Redeemer constitute it. In His own person He embodies every power of its religious inspiration and constraint—righteousness in all its sanctity, love in all its tenderness, and self-sacrifice in all its greatness—all pass into a personal gratitude and affection. Behind all Christian idea stands the ineffable Christ Himself—that wondrous personality of peerless sanctity, ineffable love, divine characteristic, and human perfection: the embodiment not of one class of excellences only, but of all.

The person of Jesus Christ is the insoluble problem of scepticism. Fierce battles are fought about Christian doctrines; before the Christ Himself hostility itself drops its weapons, and does Him homage. You may exorcise Christian doctrines from men's heads, you cannot exorcise the ineffable person of Christ from men's hearts. Towards the person of Christ we feel as we cannot feel towards even the invisible and personal Father. This, indeed, was one great purpose of the incarnation. We could not approach God; God therefore

thus approaches us. The incarnate Christ is "the new and living way" to the Father.

No law of holiness, or scheme of salvation could have inspiring power compared with a holy and saving person. I may admire a perfect law; I cannot feel towards it the love that a person incites. The supreme satisfaction of love is to gratify the feeling of its object; we therefore seek to please Christ. Love does not calculate what it *ought* to do; it does not count the cost; it is a living impulse. Sacrifice becomes positive delight; the greater the sacrifice the more satisfied the love that can thus express itself.

The power of Christ's person, therefore, is the distinctive power of Christianity. It is not merely gratitude for benefits that come to me; it is admiration, love, worship for Him by whom the benefits come. I am not painfully trying to do a duty; I am seeking to express love and worship. The inspiration is in my very self—my heart, my life. It is not so much a feeling that I possess, as a feeling that possesses me; so that I move towards Christ in all the inspirations, in all the entireness of my being. Imagination itself cannot conceive a greater inspiration of human life. He is all men's Christ. Men's highest conceptions, their holiest sympathies, their tenderest affections, are centred in Him. Publicans revered Him; the Magdalen worshipped Him; the penitent thief prayed to Him. Their hearts confessed Him—He "told them all that ever they did."

Amongst even the supernatural characteristics of Christ's personality and of His mission, Paul gives a singular and emphatic prominence to His death. "He died for all."

Is it possible, think you, to explain the terms in which

he speaks of Christ's death on any theory of mere martyrdom, or of willing self-sacrifice in the maintenance of fidelity?

Truth has had many martyrs—men who, in simple fidelity to conviction and uprightness, have laid down their lives. Have men ever spoken of the death of a mere martyr as Paul speaks of the death of Jesus Christ? Did the Jews ever so speak of the death of Isaiah? Does Plato or Xenophon ever so speak of the death of Socrates? Do we ever so speak of the death of Paul? What other martyrdom excites such feelings—such passionate worship and consecration, on the one hand, such passionate repudiation and resentment, on the other? Certainly Paul and his fellow-apostles preached the death of Christ in terms strangely incongruous if it were only a martyrdom. As certainly those who heard them, and those who from that time to this have read their expositions of it, and yielded themselves to the inspirations of it, have understood it to be much more. Think of the peculiarity of the terms applied to it. "To the Jews it was a stumbling-block;" but why "a stumbling-block," if only a martyrdom like that of John the Baptist? "To the Greeks it was foolishness;" but why "foolishness," if a mere martyrdom like that of Socrates? ~~A persecution, an injustice, a fitting penalty for blasphemy, they might have designated it, but what congruity is there in the designations "stumbling-block" and "foolishness"? Clearly the death of Christ was presented to these Greeks as the expression of a moral idea—a theological truth. They could see no moral philosophy, no theological wisdom, no ethical fitness, in a forgiveness of sins which had as its basis the incarnation of the Son of God, and as its reason His crucifixion in Jerusalem.~~

The conclusion that Paul had come to was that

Christ had "died for all." Can it seriously be maintained that he meant by the phrase, that His death was merely an example to all—a constraining influence of pious fidelity to truth, to conscience, and to God; or that He died a victim to His own wilfulness, an impulsive martyr to the truth and holiness that He taught? Is not Paul's natural and obvious meaning that which finds such varied expression in his writings, that He died a vicarious sacrifice for the whole world of sinful men? The constraint that was so resistless, therefore, was the constraint of a transcendent doctrine of God's forgiveness.

Taken by itself, the apostle's phrase does not lay down any theory of the Atonement, beyond its implication of great and obvious principles of righteousness. The New Testament contains no metaphysical theory of Atonement. It simply affirms the Atonement as a fact of the divine order, to be apprehended and rested upon in its general principle. The history of Christian theology has no characteristic so prominent as its manifold theories of the Atonement—its human conceptions of divine things. The substantial fact of the Atonement has been continuously held from the beginning; but theories of its philosophy have succeeded each other almost as rapidly as the succeeding centuries. And these have been often most grotesque, sometimes most immoral, grossly misrepresenting the divine Father, and sometimes unconsciously blaspheming Him. Is it too much to say that theories of the Atonement have done more mischief to Christianity itself than all antagonistic assaults upon it?

Is God, for example, a stern, resentful Sovereign—moved by angry vindictive feeling, that cannot be appeased save by the pouring out of Christ's life-blood

on the cross? A thousand times No! Do I not read, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" that "in this the love of God was manifested"? Whatever the character of Christ's mission and death, He comes from the very heart of the Father's pitying love. "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom."

Is the divine Father a merchant of souls—making a commercial bargain with the atoning Son—so many souls to be saved for so much suffering endured?

Or is He an arbitrary Sovereign—willing the salvation of an elect few, and determining the perdition of a reprobate many? Again I say a thousand times No! Do I not read that "Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man;" "that He will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;" that it is the great sorrow of Christ's heart that men "will not come to Him that they may have life;" that He shed bitter tears over Jerusalem, because when so often He would have gathered her she would not?

Or is God an economical judge, a casuistical lawyer—employing legal fictions, technically imputing innocence to the guilty, guilt to the innocent? Does He declare me accepted on the legal fiction that I am sinless? Does He inflict penalty upon Christ on the legal fiction that He is guilty? A thousand times No! It is morally impossible that this can be the character of Christ's sacrifice. There can be no unreality, no legal technicality, in God's methods of procedure. I am forgiven as avowedly a guilty man; Christ is beloved by the Father avowedly because "He always pleases Him." Where is it said that God inflicts penalty upon Christ; that, as our substitute, Christ suffers what we should

have suffered? "He was bruised for our iniquities;" "The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquities of us all;" "He died the just for the unjust;" He suffers because of the sins of His fellow-men. Yes! but such phrases do not need even the extenuation of our poverty of thought, of our inadequacy of language; they simply affirm the cause of Christ's suffering. Such sufferings are no more legal penalty than is the anguish of a virtuous father, or of a pure mother, over the profligacy of a son, or the shame of a daughter. The suffering may be far more intense than that of the wrongdoer, but in no sense is it legal infliction—substitutionary suffering.

The death of Christ has an aspect God-wards. It is a legal necessity that the inseparable evil of sin, the inviolable law of holiness should be thus manifested, in order that God may be able, righteously, to forgive. In the mysterious and unspeakable anguish of Gethsemane and the cross, all men see how "evil and bitter" a thing sin is; how inseparable the connection with it of human sorrow and of divine retribution. And was not this anguish of the holy Son of Man because of the sins of His fellow-men, the atoning vindication that the holy law of God needed—a manifestation of the imperative necessity of God's righteousness? Who, looking upon the inward mysterious anguish of the holy Jesus, which the sins of even His brother-men could cause, could think lightly of sin?—pervert God's loving forgiveness into a disregard of holiness?—presume upon mere good-natured mercy? Was it not by thus suffering that Christ "magnified the law and made it honourable"?—that, in the significant phrase of the Apostle, He "shewed forth God's *righteousness* in the forgiveness of sin;" manifested God "a just God and

yet a Saviour"? What need of legal fictions when it is so demonstrated in the moral anguish of Jesus how "evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against God"?

Now is not this a wonderful representation of God—inviolable in righteousness, infinite in love? True or false, which is, intrinsically, the grander idea? Which presents the profounder holiness, the most transcendent love—a God of tender pity only, prompted only by yearning love, forgiving sinful men from the mere impulse of resistless feeling, and practically disregarding all dictates and sanctions of righteousness? He is not an ideal magistrate who, moved by uncontrollable fatherly love, refuses to convict his guilty son. Do we not feel that Young is right—

"A God all mercy were a God unjust"?

Do we not rather conceive, as our ideal, a God in whom mercy and truth meet, in whom inviolable righteousness is combined with infinite love, whose righteousness could not, for the gratification of His love, even in appearance, condone transgression; and whose love, therefore, gave His only-begotten Son to become a man that by perfect personal holiness, and unspeakable anguish because of the sins of His fellow-men, He might vindicate God's righteousness, and enable God's forgiveness—"devising means whereby His banished ones be not expelled from Him"? Is His love less because of this satisfaction for His righteousness? Nay, is it not unspeakably more? The moral power of the Atonement! Yes! but is not this great self-sacrifice to enable the gratification of His love the supreme element of its moral power? Is it not the very ideal of forgiving love?—a conception of moral grandeur that surpasses

even imagination. God so loves us that He will sacrifice even Himself for the gratification of His love.

It enhances the constraint that He who is the sacrifice consecrates Himself in unhesitating, self-sacrificing love. "Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God;" and yet He, too, in the agony of endurance from which He shrank—"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name." "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass"—the very cup that He came to drink! It is "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor;" "for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame."

What a grand and constraining conception it is! How it appeals to our wonder, our gratitude, our worship! The Father is represented as sacrificing His Son; the Son is represented as devoting Himself; and this in purest compassion—we, without moral sympathy, nay, in defiant moral antagonism,—“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;” “Not that we loved God, but that God loved us.” I say that, in the domain of pure moral conception—whether it be historically true or not—the representation is infinitely transcendent. If it be not historically true, then the reality falls short of imagination. In this instance, what God has done falls short of what He might have done.

It is this which Paul affirms to be the distinctive doctrine of Christianity; and he “determined to know nothing else among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” It was this, as the condition of divine forgiveness and redemption, which, He held, “made foolish” the philosophic “wisdom of this world.” “Christ crucified was not only the wisdom, it was the moral

power of God"—the greatest moral force in God's character and government; it is "the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God;" "the Lamb is in the midst of the throne."

Thus Paul distinguishes even in the characteristics of Jesus Christ. He specifies, not His intellectual greatness, His transcendent human goodness, His sublime theological or religious teaching, or His consecrated life of ministering benevolence, but the sublime purpose and love of His death: "the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that one died for all."

Whenever Paul gives such account of his enthusiasm for Christ as makes Festus think him mad, as makes these Grecian philosophers write him down a fool, he always specifies the death on the cross as its distinctive inspiration. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." Accept Paul's idea of the cross as a sacrifice for human sin, everything is natural and obvious; deny it, try to construct some other theory of His death, Paul's sentiment and passion are the greatest of anomalies.

The characteristics of this constraint demand a few words. I will mention but two. First, its intensity. The depth and passion of Paul's personal and practical love for Jesus Christ are simply indescribable. I doubt whether human history can furnish a parallel to it. Paul's normal feeling towards Christ was more than ordinary men's special excitements. It was a consecration, an enthusiasm, a worship, a martyrdom; which, if Christ be not absolutely divine, is, next to Christ's own claims, the most daring blasphemy in human history. Sometimes it seeks expression in terms beyond coherent meaning. He speaks about "knowing the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Sometimes he can

only exclaim—"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" The inference that he draws here is a large, and almost an audacious one. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." Not that He died for all *because* all were dead; but, as the Revised Version more accurately puts it, "One died for all, therefore all died." The moral effect of His death, in its amazing love and constraint, is that all die to self and to sin. This, he writes, is the natural, the logical, the ideal issue of His self-sacrifice. It makes sin so impossible that "they who live, live not unto themselves, but unto Him who, for their sakes, died and rose again." It is the logical sequence, the ideal result of the death of Christ—an absolute and entire consecration of life to Him. His death for us so shames and kills all sin and selfishness, inspires such grateful and enthusiastic love, that self dies in us.

All the terms employed are of peculiar intensity. "The love of Christ constraineth us"—urges us, presses upon us—not, of course, resistlessly, like a physical force—there were no moral excellency in that—but with a transcendent power of moral inducement. The very mind that was in Christ Jesus, and that impelled Him to His sacrifice, is produced in us, and impels us to His service,—love for love. It is not that our understanding reasons; it is not that our selfishness calculates; this is not the manner and inspiration of love. It is that sentiment is quickened; the spontaneous instincts and inspirations of self-sacrificing love—a new heart, a new life, are quickened within us. "We love Him because He first loved us." It is in this distinctive and striking way that the apostle explains his Christian enthusiasm. It is, he affirms, the sacrificial character of Christ's death which has produced in him such a

sense of obligation, and constrained him to grateful love and service. No literature records feelings so passionate, consecration so entire. Novalis speaks of Spinoza as a "God-intoxicated man." Much more truly might Paul be designated a "Christ-intoxicated man." And in manifold degrees this is the characteristic of Christian life in every age. It is the distinctive inspiration of all Christian service, and that which makes Christian service so transcendent.

We stand appalled before the mighty forces of evil, working through the strong, mad passions of men, and filling the world with wrong and misery—even when some divine quickening makes us conscious of our own moral evil, when we begin to struggle against sinful feeling, and try to subdue it. Let a man grapple with any strong passion—with lust, greed, selfishness, pride, bad temper—how indomitable it is! How it persists against all the power of his moral sense, against all his recognitions of God, all the resolves of his will; often reducing him to Paul's mood of despair—"The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"

There is a force that does deliver us, as by a kind of moral magic; that gives the strength of passion to desire, the strength of determination to the will, the strength of enthusiasm and fortitude to endeavour. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." His name works like a spell; life and inspiration are at once imparted; the adequate Christian force is at once attained; so that he who but yesterday recklessly blasphemed, now passionately prays, steadfastly resists, successfully attains.

What is this marvellous cross which lays hold upon all

that is deepest and strongest in a man, and fills his whole nature with its energy ; which leads men like Polycarp, and half-civilised pagans like the Malagasy, to die as martyrs ; men like Xavier and John Williams, to go forth as missionaries, "not counting their lives dear to them ;" men like Whitefield and Wesley, to preach to colliers at the pit's mouth, and to the mob at Moorfields ; and thousands of obscure, patient, self-sacrificing men, to work as pastors or evangelists, or ragged school teachers in city crowds ? No mere martyrdom ever generated such inspirations : it is the simple feeling, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Much, too, might be said about what we may call the humanity of this great inspiration,—the marvellous way in which grateful love to Christ becomes a Christ-like love, a philanthropic love, full of human sympathies, solitudes, and services. But I must forbear. It must suffice to say that it would be a partial, imperfect, and even selfish love, were its only inspirations God-wards and Christ-wards—in the sense of grateful acknowledgment for personal benefits. He who thinks only of his own soul, and of what Christ has done for him ; who seeks every religious ministry, and estimates every religious thing solely for his own religious help and comfort, has not very much of a soul to save ; and could scarcely expose his soul to greater peril of being lost. No selfishness is so incongruous and perilous as religious selfishness. In nothing are we more unfaithful to Christ than in selfish Christian life—sequestering ourselves in churches, in services of worship, in monastic retreats, in exclusive fellowships, under pretence of cultivating personal piety. It is the characteristic of

Christ's love that He thought not of Himself, only of those whom He came to save; it was His "grace" that, "though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor." Christ-like love, therefore, is full of philanthropic inspirations. It is not only piety, as in adoration and worship; it is not only religion, as in holy obedience; it is philanthropy, in intense human solitudes and affections, and in self-sacrificing ministries; it is sympathy with Christ in His yearning pity and seeking. He the most effectually saves his soul who forgets it in seeking to save the souls of others. Can there be a greater peril to health than to be ever morbidly brooding over its ministries and processes? He best helps his digestion who forgets it in healthy activities.

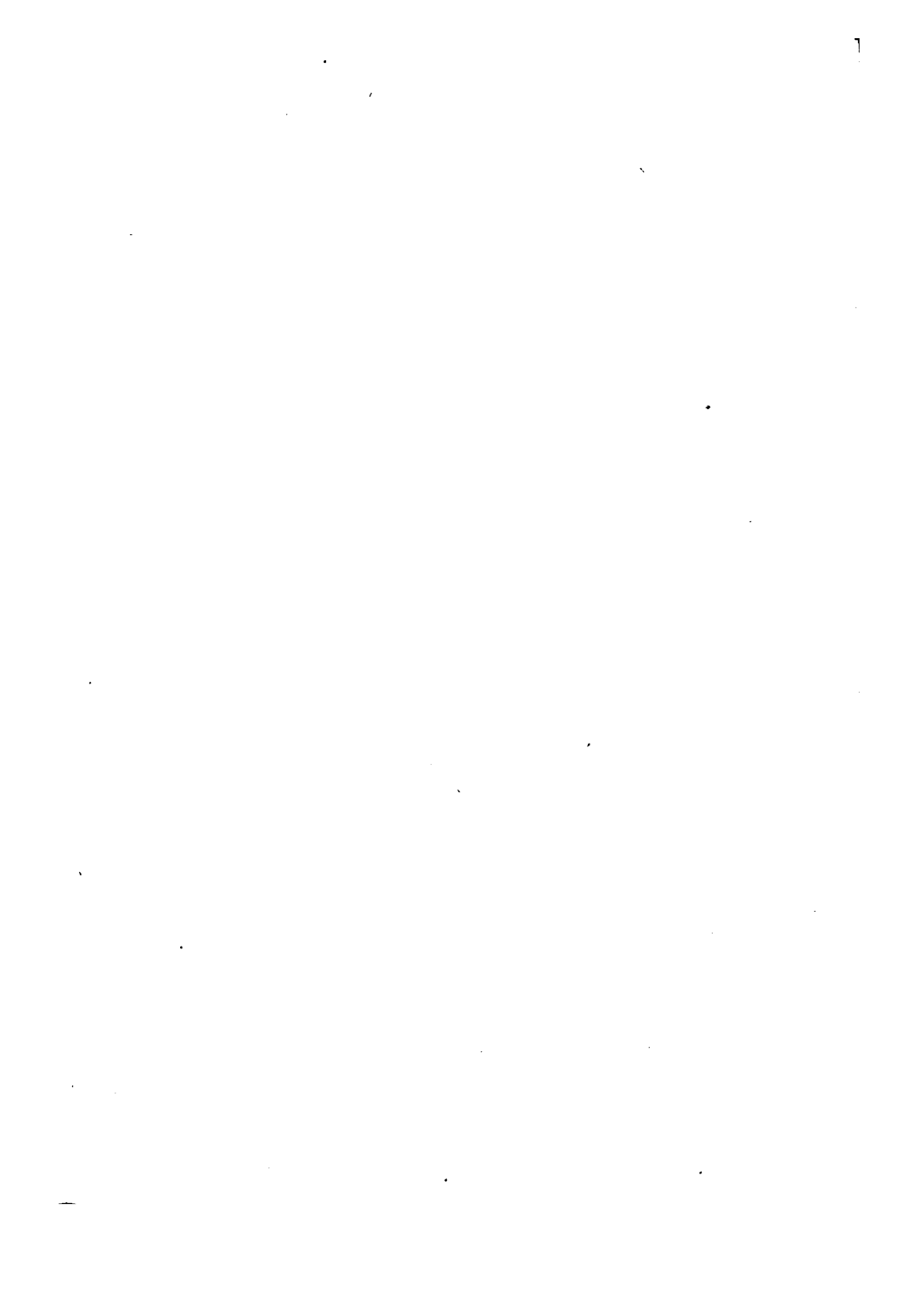
Worship! Yes! Jesus Christ worshipped in the synagogue, and prayed all night on the mountain top; but all the day long He was found in the cities and villages of Judea, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead; often having "no leisure so much as to eat." "Nothing was foreign to Him that was human." Life can have no sequestered domain. Wherever the man is true, and with whatever he comes into contact, there the instincts, sympathies, and inspirations of life will work. God accepts no service that is not prompted by the real life of the man; but every right service that is so prompted He accepts as done unto Him. It may be a more religious thing to nurse a sick child than to sing worshipping hymns in a church. To make business righteous, to sanctify politics, to make newspapers ministers of noble manhood, to make amusements pure, to alleviate the manifold miseries of life, under the inspirations of human brotherhood,—these are amongst the highest achievements of practical religion. There is nothing in human life that Jesus Christ

is not to inspire and control. He who is not serving his fellow-men is not serving Christ.

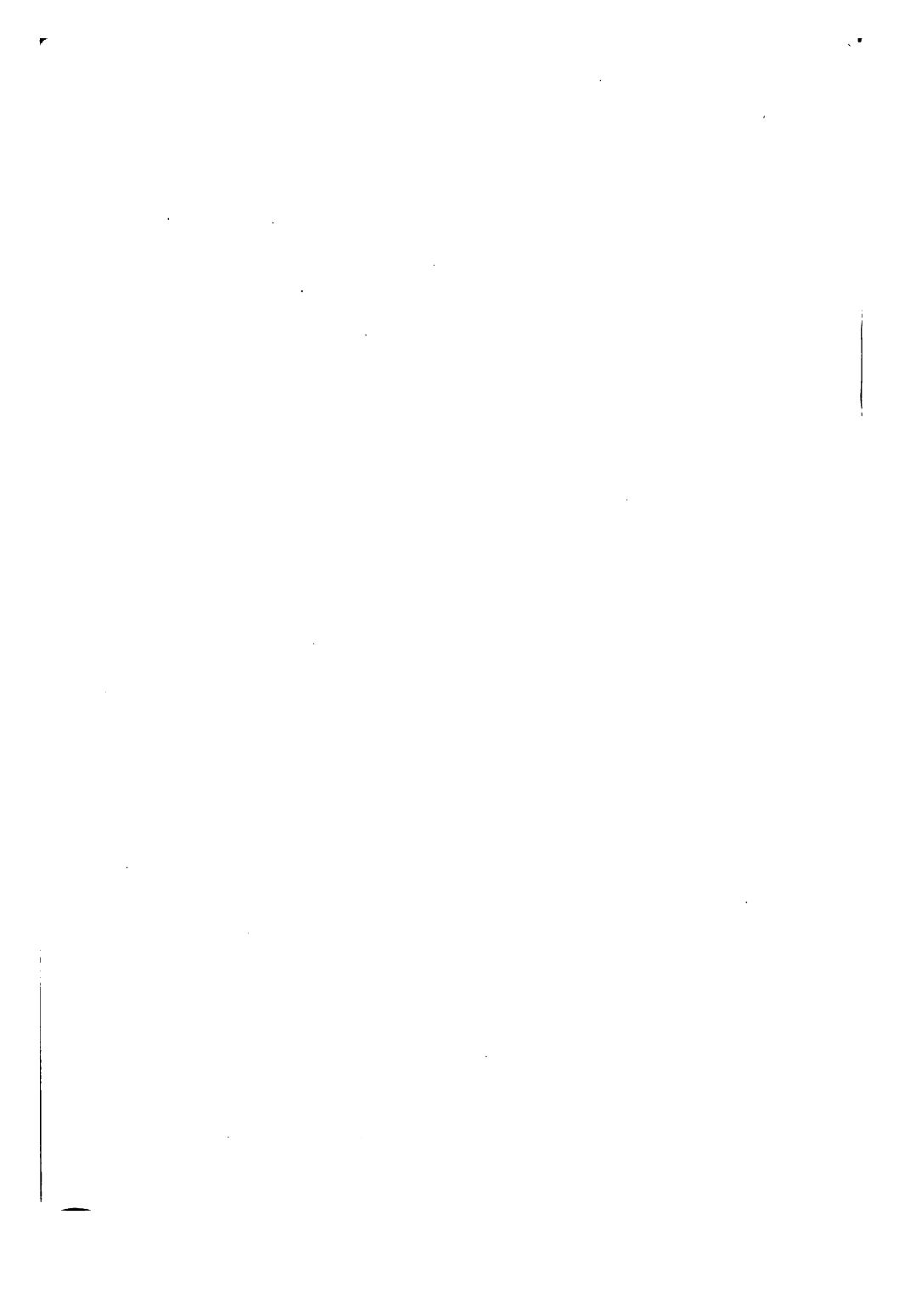
And yet, just now it seems necessary to insist that we may not inculcate the practical service, and be neglectful of its great inspiring sentiments. "The Gospel of humanity!"—Yes! but only because it is first "the Gospel of Christ." A catalogue of duties is no equivalent for the loving spirit of service. Galvanic force is no substitute for the energy of life. He will not be a very successful horticulturist who bestows all his culture upon the foliage and the fruit, and neglects the tree and its roots. The inspirations of life may be easily lost in the very bustle of religious activities. Let the life be nurtured into strength, and it will abound in fruitfulness. "Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good." Therefore it is that, as the only true and adequate inspiration of Christian philanthropy, we cease not to "preach Christ crucified."

Brethren, what a grand conception of life it is—the indwelling of Christ in a man, whereby he is filled with the inspirations of Christ's own life; so that, without formal purpose, or coercion of will, he spontaneously expresses his very self! "The love of Christ constrains him," possesses his entire being, touches all its springs, animates all its affections, directs all its energies. There are no barriers against inspirations of the Spirit; only they who have no interpreting sympathies can deem them fanatical. Only life can understand life; only love can understand love. "The life that we live in the flesh is a life of faith in the Son of God." Our first solitudes, therefore, are to be given, not to things that we are to do, but to the life that we are to culture. In all its emotions and potencies, we perfect it only by great realizations of Christ—by intelligent thought, by

generous emotions, by spiritual fellowship, by practical endeavour. We labour in the spirit of His service, we sacrifice ourselves in the spirit of His passion. So shall we feel His quickening power, be kindled to His intense sympathies, and in intuitive recognition and self-sacrificing service, our very presence shall, like His, be everywhere a blessing. And, thus identifying ourselves with Him in His redeeming work, we shall share in the rapturous joy, the perfect satisfaction, with which He shall "see of the travail of His soul."



THE PEACE OF GOD, AND WHAT HINDERS IT.



THE PEACE OF GOD, AND WHAT HINDERS IT.

"In nothing be anxious ; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."—*PHIL. IV. 6, 7.*

THE superlatives of the New Testament writers are bestowed mostly upon the practical realizations of religion. That which is merely speculative is eschewed. But little is said about the great mysteries of being—about God, life, the mystery of Christ, the life of the future. And what is said about these things always presents them on their practical side ; it is said only for practical uses. The New Testament urges all things to practical tests and solutions. Is the intellectual mystery inscrutable?—then put it to the proof by experiments of practical life. Does the requirement seem impossible or inordinate?—test it by trying. "He that doeth the will of God shall know of the doctrine." Most theological difficulties will yield to practical tests.

We are to attain to a "peace of God which passeth all understanding." The experience is to transcend every intellectual effort to understand it.

If any of us were bidden to name the things in Christianity which pass all understanding, we should probably begin with doctrinal difficulties—the being of God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, Atonement, Regeneration, human life, the life with God hereafter. The Apostle

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would begin with religious experiences—experiences that are ineffable ; God's "unspeakable gift," "knowing the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," being "filled with all the fulness of God," God "doing for us exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think," "the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory," "the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

The doctrinal mysteries of the spiritual life are great enough ; no intellect can comprehend them ; there are unsearchable depths of divine wisdom ; but its religious experiences are equally inscrutable. We cannot understand the life that we realize. Language is no adequate vehicle for conveying the knowledge of spiritual experiences to others ; only common experiences of life can enable sympathy and consciousness—"we comprehend with all saints the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." And this only in very imperfect degree ; not only do we fall short of much that in the life of God may be realized, we have very dim and imperfect understanding of the measure of it that we do realize. How baffled a man is when he ponders the mysteries of his own conscious being ! most of all when he rises to the higher experiences of spiritual life—to any condition to which these superlatives could be fairly applied, "The peace of God which passeth all understanding guarding our hearts and thoughts" !

It is then an ideal of peaceful blessed life that is set before us ; a peace that is not merely the negation of all that disquiets, that phlegmatic dulness or death itself might realize, but a peace that shall be the harmony of acute vital forces ; in which passion is strong, and sensibility keen ; a peace in the exercise of all faculty and feeling, not in the negation or dulling of them.

All religion works thus. It does not destroy or disable anything in human nature. It attempts it, and perfects it. It is the perfect harmony of all the perfected faculties of human nature.

I cannot dwell upon the ideal, nor upon the long and graduated process by which it is to be realized—the struggles, the schoolings, the developments of life and faith, until the man has realized the very life of God Himself; made himself largely independent of mere circumstance; and draws his satisfactions less and less from the lower life of the senses, and more and more from the higher life of the soul. The more purely spiritual a man, the more absolutely he finds his satisfactions in God, the more exquisitely he enjoys all pure pleasures of physical life; his faculty of enjoyment is more—it is larger, it is stronger, it is more refined. Abraham was never so qualified to rejoice in his son as when his faith was ready to sacrifice him. The faith was his supreme faculty for enjoyment. So, growing spirituality, growing independence of internal things, is not growing insensibility or asceticism; it is not a negation of the lower life of the senses. The very reverse: it is an exaltation and intensifying of the higher life of the spirit. We more intensely realize God, and live in Him, and find Him in all things. He “comes in to us, and abides with us.” Our character, our spirit, our temper are undergoing an etherializing process; we become more and more spiritual; more and more unconsciously like God in our satisfactions and our character. The inspirations of God are upon the man: his own nature has become God-like; and he realizes the keeping of his heart and his thought, in all their varied faculty and play, in “the peace of God that passeth all

understanding"—the pure, peaceful, spiritual condition of his soul.

The Apostle, however, speaks of certain things which hinder the attainment of this ideal ; and the practical thing for us is to understand these hindrances and remove them.

The evil that he would prohibit is care—over-anxiety about the things of life. Only the shallowest of eager infidelities could—with Strauss and Buckle and others—construe this as an injunction to disregard the ordinary obligations of human industry, prudence, and foresight. This is the doctrine of the monastery, or of the ascetic. The entire teaching and spirit of Christianity forbid such a construction. No duties are made more imperative than those of ordinary toil. "If a man will not work neither shall he eat." If he "do not provide for his own he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." He is to "work with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Duties to our families, our neighbours, our country, are as imperative as duties to God. "In diligence, not slothful." Christ will justify no man who, under plea of attending to spiritual things, neglects common duties of life. A man may not neglect his business to preach in a pulpit, or to teach in a school. A woman may not neglect her husband and children to attend a prayer meeting. If a man's affairs get into a state of embarrassment, or a woman's children go about with unmended clothes, or grow up ill-mannerly and uneducated, it is no excuse that it was for the sake even of saving men's souls. I am to do these common things "heartily as unto the Lord ;" in them "I serve the Lord Christ." My highest duty is the duty that lies next me. Great religious

principles have their sphere in the least and lowliest duties. When most fervent in spirit I may be most diligent in business, so serving the Lord.

On the other hand, no man, under pretence of providing for his own, may so devote his time, and thought, and strength to business as that he neglects altogether the things of the soul. No business is rightly pursued that is not, first, itself made a service of the Lord ; and, next, that is not so adjusted as to be compatible with spiritual culture and religious worship and work.

The care condemned is over-anxious solicitude about material things—a restless, wearing, fretting anxiety, that cannot do our best and then calmly leave issues in the hands of God's providence. "I would have you without carefulness ;" "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." Even the little anxieties about His entertainment sufficed to disqualify Martha for her Master's instruction ; and therefore to hinder the calm blessed peace of leisurely fellowship with Him.

Few things are more difficult than to limit our care so that that which, in itself, is a religious duty may not, in its excess, become a religious hindrance.

Exercises of faith are more easy in spiritual things than they are in temporal things. Material things are more tangible : they seem more remote from the domain of unintelligent trust, they seem more amenable to effort and circumstance ; so that we can often trust God implicitly with the interests of our souls when we are utterly despairing about our food and clothing. The slightest derangement of our business plans, the least cloud in our business prospects, the least check in our business prosperity is often too much for our faith. We give way to despondency ; every experience seems

a presage of evil ; every road tangled and rough ; - we receive no gift of God with joy ; we offer no prayer with thanksgiving. We fret ourselves, and, perhaps, "charge God foolishly."

There are things that we have no right to care about at all, things of sheer envy and covetousness. How our cares would be lessened were they limited to things fairly belonging to us ! How our burdens would be diminished were we to throw off all that are self-imposed ! How much more alert our course were we to lay aside the weights with which we have clogged ourselves ! How gratuitously Ahab multiplied his cares when he vexed his spirit about Naboth's vineyard ; and Haman when he permitted his mortification about Mordecai to poison all his enjoyments ; and the rich man when he troubled himself about barns for his accumulated goods ! And how utterly inimical such cares were to growth in spiritual satisfaction—in the peace of God !

If we covet wealth that God has not given us, or honours that others achieve ; or disregard the moral limits of accumulation, and permit the determination to be rich to become a masterful passion, we disquiet our spirit. A man who inordinately accumulates makes for "himself many cares." "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil ; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

They, too, who are always foreboding evil, always looking on the dark side of things, and, if there be a

disastrous possibility, anticipate it, make cares for themselves. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Even anxiety about duty has its limits, which, when overpassed, becomes a disqualifying burden, presses down the springs of action, and disables the judgment. I may be so afraid of doing wrong that I never do right.

The difficulty is to discriminate between cares that are lawful and cares that are not lawful. Perhaps the best test is Paul's test of prayer. Pray about it. That is a lawful care about which I can intelligently pray; which, with no sense of incongruity I can cast upon Him "who careth for me." Ahab could not have prayed about Naboth's vineyard, nor Haman about Mordecai's homage, nor the rich fool about his new barns. Nor can we about many of our speculations and enterprises. The true remedy for such cases of covetousness and worldliness is, not to ask God to gratify the passion, but to lessen it. The remedy for the care of covetousness is to cease to covet, for the miserable care of envy to cease to be envious, for an embarrassment of riches to disencumber ourselves of them, for inordinate toil and solicitude about business to diminish it. It is a mockery to seek relief from the care of bad passions by praying to God to gratify them. Why should a man think that he must reach such a standard of wealth, or enlarge his business to such a magnitude? There are moral considerations which put other limits to accumulation besides those of possibility.

The test of prayer is a very searching one. Can I speak out fully to God my motives and desires, and ask Him to bless them? Imagine a covetous or an envious man going to God with the vexation that another man's possessions give him, or a reckless speculator with the

anxieties of his gambling risks ! If we take these things to God at all, it must surely be with penitence and shame and renouncement ; and with the prayer that he would help us to strive against them as a temptation and a hindrance to the true peace of the spiritual life.

It is difficult also to distinguish between the measure of legitimate desire which is right, and the excess of it which is wrong. Two or three suggestions may help us.

The legitimate measure of even lawful care is exceeded when religious trust in God is disabled : when our spirit is so disquieted and absorbed that we cannot pray, save in the utterance of imperious desire ; when the care intrudes at all times, and overpowers all feelings ; so that we absolutely cannot leave the issue with God. Then our care or sorrow has been permitted to grow into excess. It may be that our extremity, our agony, may be very great ; we may "pray with our faces to the ground," we may come to God with a great wail of woe. But, notwithstanding, there may underlie all this the ultimate principle of faith, the faith that says, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

That degree of lawful care is wrong which distempers the mind and the heart, which disturbs the balance of the judgment, and makes us moody, irritable, or passionate in feeling—angry with ourselves, with those around us, and with the lot that Providence has ordained for us.

That degree of lawful care is wrong which impels us to take sinful or doubtful measures for the relief of it ; when we tamper with high principle, put pressure upon conscience, have recourse to crooked ways, doubtful expedients for getting money, cowardly shifts for deceiving

those about us. One half of the wrongdoing of life springs, not from purposed fraud, but from moral cowardice in difficult circumstances—the temporary use of securities, profligate borrowing, perhaps with the full purpose of doing justly in the long run. Let a man do all that lawfully may be done, but refuse to have recourse to a single doubtful expedient, to take one step in a crooked way ; let him leave issues in God's hands ; then he may fairly enough come to God in prayer.

Undue care is one of the most inveterate forms of unbelief. We are slow to believe in its wrong and inutility. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" All the anxiety in the world cannot help us beyond the natural measure or law of things. Above most things anxiety disqualifies us for what we might otherwise do. It wears out physical energies, takes the vital spirit out of a man. Instead of a sound mind in a healthy body, he has to contend with a disordered mind in a body nervously unstrung. He is "careworn" ; his energies collapse. He can neither work by day, nor sleep by night ; full of morbid activity, he does nothing ; his over-anxiety has defeated itself.

Upon those around him the influence of his care is in every way unhappy. It disquiets his home, afflicts his friends, and makes them as careworn as himself. Upon his religious life it is simply disastrous ; his religious light and faith are destroyed. He can neither hold fellowship with God, trust God, nor serve God. His prayer is disqualified. He is full of discontent and distrust ; thankfulness is extinguished, and evil desire works in furtive and subtle ways ; the worm of unbelief is at the core of all his religiousness. Few things mar life more than over anxious care : cheerfulness is destroyed,

uprightness imperilled, religious faith and love and joy made wellnigh impossible. The true peace of God is effectually hindered.

How is this great hindrance to peace to be counteracted?

"The strong man armed" can be cast out only by a stronger than he; we cannot cast out the evil spirit and leave an empty heart—a "house swept and garnished." Natural human feeling must have something whereon to rest; you cannot say to a human heart, "Be careful for nothing," and propose no remedy for its care. It rests upon its misfortune or fear; the true remedy is to rest it on God. It need not so care because the Man of Sorrows is "afflicted in all our afflictions." He is our human brother, and is "touched with the feeling of our infirmity"; while He is our almighty helper, with "all things delivered into His hands." Or if we think of the Heavenly Father, He is infinite in His tender compassions, and full of divine wisdom and power.

Here then is the place and privilege of prayer. To speculative reasoning it seems an incongruous and absurd thing to turn from effort to prayer, from inexorable laws of nature to a divine interference. How can prayer influence Him whose laws are divinely ordained, whose purposes are fixed by the necessary perfections of His character? How can we gain, by praying, things that we should fail of if we did not pray? How can the contingencies of prayer be wrought into the texture of God's providences?

Questions more easily asked than answered. The Bible never attempts to answer them; it simply bids us obey the religious, the natural instinct of our souls,

and pray to Him who is almighty. It bids us seek the solution of such reasoning by experiment. Instead of trying to harmonize secondary causes with the great First Cause, human agency with divine purposes, pray. These questions affect God's government of the world, not our agency in it; they are for Him to reconcile rather than for us. If He tell me to pray, and if He have made the instinct of prayer so strong in my nature, let me simply obey Him, and leave Him to adjust the prayer that He enjoins, with the unknown forces and conditions of the law that He administers. He will maintain the harmony and rectitude of His own proceedings. Pray, and "the peace of God shall guard your heart and mind."

It may be said, however, that we never contemplate in our prayer that He shall reverse any physical law of things. The physician does not when we invoke his aid in sickness. He simply diverts the action of law, counteracts one operation of law by another. Can we deny such power to the Almighty Father? May not His hand direct His laws without suspending them? Nay, is it not the very inviolability of law that enables our prayer? How could we act in human life if physical laws were ever changing; if sometimes the fire would not burn, or the water not drown? We can adjust our remedies and counteractions simply because law is inviolable. Answers to prayer would be impossible were the world a chaos instead of an inviolable organism. Without fixed law, not only miracle but ordinary human help would be impossible.

And how wonderfully one great end of prayer such as this is realised. A man who so prays may not get the cause of his care removed—Paul did not get his thorn in the flesh taken away, but he attained to a feeling that it

could not disturb ; God's grace was sufficient for him—he prays himself into harmony with God's will and feeling. He attains to a faith in the Heavenly Father's wise love that the trouble cannot disable. We wish Him to do that which He deems best. We rise in our prayer above our circumstances, above ourselves. The Apostle does not say, " Let your requests be made known unto God and they shall be granted," but, " Let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God shall guard your heart and mind." The man becomes, which is far more than that he receives. He "glories in his infirmities."

What profound philosophy there is in all this ! How it answers to the yearning of burdened hearts to tell their sorrows, to seek a sympathiser, even though he may not help ! His sympathy is help. Lear raves out his agony to the winds, and finds relief in doing so. He does not get external help, but his own heart finds relief.

"In everything by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto God." How characteristically large and inclusive it is ! No reserve is necessary with the Heavenly Father. No care is too minute for His sympathy. We are to tell Him everything that troubles us—the passing fear as well as the abiding sorrow. We cannot wrong His nature and feeling more than by deeming anything too insignificant. The power of life consists in its little things. The tempest may leave its mark upon life, but life is fed and attempered by the daily sunshine and the nightly dews.

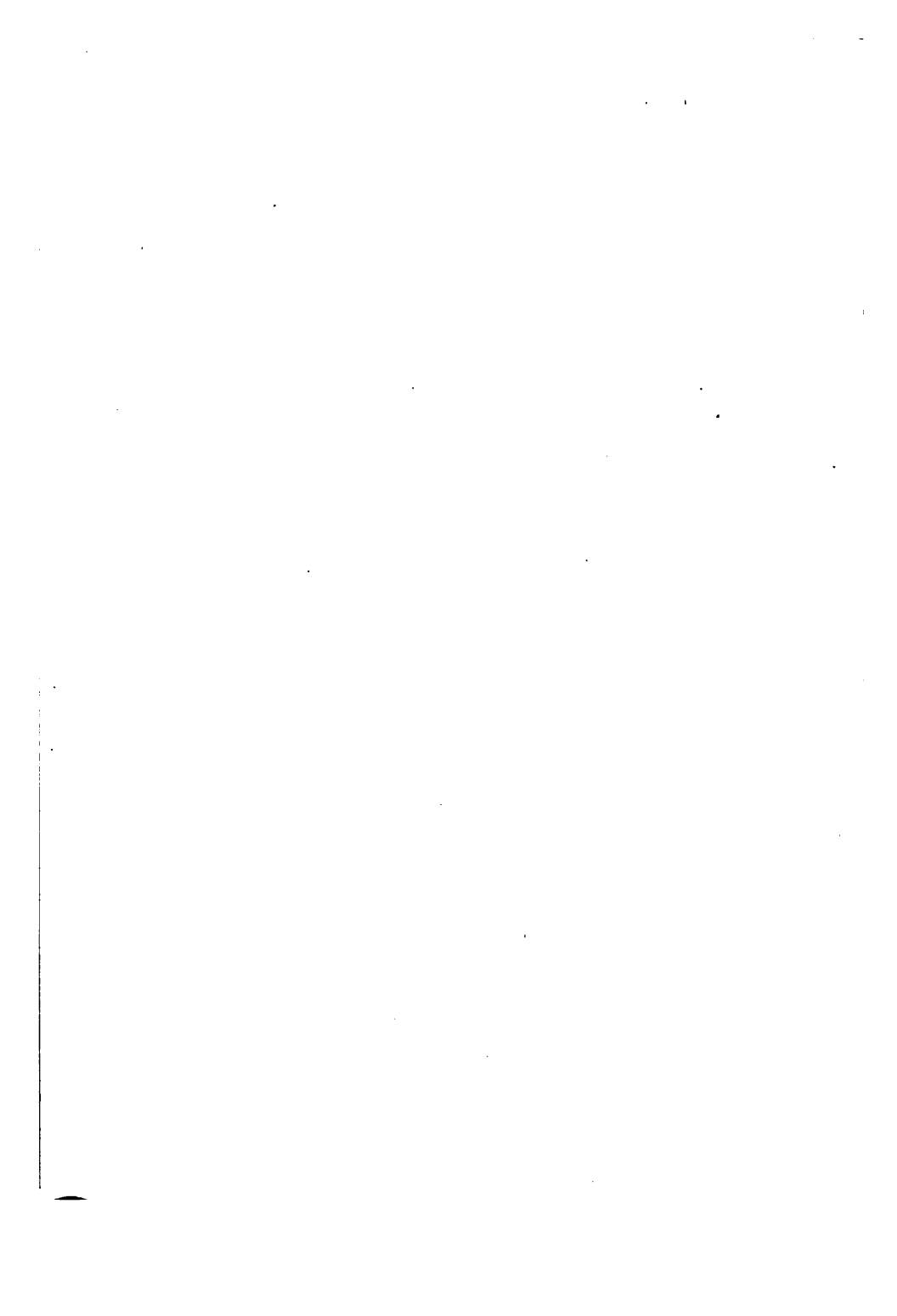
"With thanksgiving." Every prayer is to have the feeling of God's goodness—the sense of past mercies, the consciousness of blessing as being more in our experience than sorrow ; yea, of blessing as coming

through the sorrow. The divine Lord sang a hymn of thanksgiving before He went out to the Mount of Olives.

Thus perfect peace will be attained ; the ideal of life will be realised ; we shall, in the strong calmness of our spirit, in the strong assurance of God, be greater than all circumstance. " In the world we shall have tribulation, in Christ we shall have peace." Our hearts and minds will be kept by our faith and spirituality of feeling ; guarded, as a fortress is guarded, against the possibility of disturbance. Nothing but these inspirations of God, these attemperings of the inward life, can keep us peaceful in this world of mighty sorrows and multiplied cares. Our life is exposed to terrible forces, frail and powerless, a fragile barque tossed with the tempest. Only by receiving Christ into it can there be a calm.

A "peace that passes all understanding ;"—that no mere thought of man can analyse ; that is an ineffable experience, more in its consciousness than thought can shape. What can disquiet a soul full of spiritual assurance and divine feeling, that accepts all experiences as divinely wise, and that consciously "dwells in the secret place of the Most High" ? It is kept, not merely by the hand of an external power, by a defence built around it, but by an internal spirituality and strength. It lives God's own life, is a "partaker of the divine nature." Not only does the Master say, "Peace I leave with you ;" He further says, "*My* peace give I unto you"—"the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

Such is the marvellous power of the life that is in Christ. It makes us Christ-like, endows us with His consciousness, and enriches us with His resources.



THE PROFITABLENESS OF SCRIPTURE.

THE PROFITABLENESS OF SCRIPTURE.

"Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."—2 TIM. III. 16-17.

THERE is scarcely any verse of Scripture over which fiercer, more dusty, and more profitless battle has waged than over this. And yet it is a very simple affirmation; certainly not intended by its writer for polemical purposes, but resting upon indisputable experience, and intended for practical uses. I think we may redeem it from the field of theological strife, and use it simply for our religious instruction and edification. Not, however, without briefly indicating its points of difficulty.

The Apostle is addressing a practical exhortation to Timothy, a young preacher of Christianity. He urges him to give no heed to evil men and seducers, who, deceiving and being deceived, would wax worse and worse. He is to continue steadfast in the Christian things which he has been taught, and of the truth of which he has been convinced, especially remembering of whom he had learned them; referring possibly to himself as having been Timothy's apostolic instructor, but more probably to Timothy's mother, Lois, and his grandmother, Eunice. That the tender memories of his education in childhood are thus invoked seems to be

indicated by the words that follow : " From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The great profit to Timothy of this early instruction in the Scriptures is further affirmed by a statement of the general value of the Scriptures in the nurture of the spiritual life. So that the object of the writer is simply to affirm the value or profitableness of Scripture in the religious culture of the life. The Scriptures will instruct him, and discipline him, and perfect his qualification for living a godly life. The difficulties that have sprung up around the passage, and which have been debated with so much controversial heat, have arisen from the terms employed in making this affirmation.

It is clear that when the Apostle thus wrote there existed a collection of writings familiarly called " the Scriptures "—the writings of the Old Testament which constituted the sacred Book of the Jews. " Search the Scriptures," said our Lord, with a well-understood reference, " and these are they which bear witness of me." " Have ye never read in the Scriptures ? " " Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." " How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled ? " " He opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures."

That any of the New Testament writings are included in the reference is not probable, although Paul was now within a few months of his death ; and the first three Gospels, the Acts, and his own letters were written ; probably, however, these had not yet come to take rank with the Old Testament Scriptures, and certainly they were no part of the nurture of Timothy's childhood.

Then there come some grammatical difficulties. Does he mean every Scripture in the sense of each separate

Old Testament writing, or does he mean the whole of the Old Testament collection? The word which he employs will bear either of these meanings. I do not see that it matters: the practical result is substantially the same, whether we read, as in the A.V., "all Scripture," or, as in the R.V., "every Scripture."

A more serious difficulty arises next. In the Greek, as is common in that language, the verb "to be" does not occur at all, it has to be supplied mentally; the little word "is" is therefore inserted by the translators. In the A.V. it reads, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." In the R.V. we read, "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable." The grave question therefore arises, Which of these translations puts it in the right place? Clearly there is a difference of meaning. The R.V. seems the most natural. But practically again I do not see that it makes the slightest difference. The object of the Apostle obviously is to pronounce a general encomium upon the collection of sacred writings popularly known as "the Scriptures," which had been so valuable to Timothy in his early education. It is not a critical discrimination between one Scripture and another: it is a general characterization of the whole body of Scripture generally received as such.

Then follow two great affirmations concerning the Scriptures. First, they are inspired of God; next, they are religiously profitable.

First, however, it is necessary to bear in mind the distinction between inspiration and revelation.

Inspiration is an inbreathing, a vital quickening of whatever may be the normal faculties of a man, whereby their natural force and religious sensibilities are augmented; such as we conceive the processes of the Holy

Spirit to be in ordinary religious life, only, here, special in its forms and measures. No formal addition to the man's knowledge is imparted, but his capability of perceiving and judging is augmented by his quickened and sanctified faculty. He knows more because he loves more. Thus, in all departments of knowledge, the inspired man is qualified to perceive and to judge more truly.

Revelation is knowledge imparted from without ; facts and truths of which we were ignorant are made known to us. God reveals his thoughts and purposes to his prophets. By a kind of natural necessity such revelations can be made known only to men inspired with vital capability and spiritual sympathies. We cannot imagine a revelation of God sent to men as a sealed packet by the hand of a messenger. Hence the deniers of revelation have contended that the greatest teachings of the Bible are only the natural product of inspired faculty, the results of greatly inspired religious genius ; that while there are revelations from these to ordinary men, there was no supernatural revelation from God to them. But if every inspiration be not a supernatural revelation, neither is supernatural revelation a mere inspiration of natural faculty. Both are to be distinctly recognised. "God spake by the prophets." This distinction being recognised, we may consider the Apostle's affirmation concerning the sacred writers.

They are inspired of God—God-breathed, the recipients of a divine afflatus. What this is, what its mode, what its degree, what its exact definition, who shall say? Like all divine inspirations, like all life, it is an impenetrable mystery. Life is God's secret. For a man, therefore, to lay down his imperative definition of Scriptural inspiration, to graduate the

degrees of it in different kinds of Scripture, history, prophecy, or psalm, to dogmatize about its specific differences from other operations and inspirations of spiritual life, is simply presumption. We do not attempt to define the mystery of the Incarnation, to put its *modus* into a proposition, to say what, in the incarnate Christ, the human elements and the divine elements exactly are, and how they act in combination. We simply accept the Incarnate whole. We do not attempt to discriminate the elements of human life, body, soul, and spirit ; to say exactly what belongs to each, or how they act in combination. It takes a body to keep a soul. We do not attempt to define life even in a plant or an animal. We do not attempt to reduce to a definition the mystery of the new birth, the regeneration of the soul of man by the Holy Spirit of God ; to discriminate in the processes of faith, of prayer, of holy resolution and striving, how much exactly is the inspiration of the divine Spirit, and how much is the working of our own natural thought and feeling. Nay, who shall say how the divine upholding works in our physical movements ? We never think of attempting definitions of these things.

The inspiration of "holy men of old, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," is also a conjunction of the divine and the human. Can anything be more preposterous than to attempt to reduce it to definitions ? When a man says to me, The inspiration of the Bible writers in no way differs from the inspiration of other genius—of a Shakespeare, a Milton, a Pascal, a Bunyan—I simply reply, How do you know ? Who has revealed to you this great mystery of inspiration ? When another affirms that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that every thought, every sentence, every word, every letter, is a veritable dictation of the Holy

Spirit, again I ask, How do you know? It is nowhere said so. While the one theory denies the supernatural element in Scripture, the other theory denies the human element, and makes it merely a divine ventriloquism, an artificial imitation of various forms of literary genius; from which my reverence shrinks. Judging from the actual product—the book as it lies before me, which is my only means of judging—it is neither. It is an incarnation of the divine in the human.

I find in it divine things, supernatural elements of teaching, of prophecy, of miracle, of harmonious developing thought, from Genesis to Revelation, of theological and moral truth infinitely transcending all possibilities of unaided human powers. I can no more mistake the divine spirit of the book than I can mistake the divine elements in the incarnate Christ, than I can mistake the throbbing life in my own physical frame. I can no more doubt the moral miracles that the Bible works, the changes that it effects in human hearts and lives—so different in kind from the effects of any other book in the world—than I can doubt the vivifying power of the sun in April, when every twig is bursting into foliage. If there are not supernatural elements in the Bible, then the intellectual miracle is a greater wonder still; then its miracles and prophecies, so marvellously harmonious with its lofty, holy teachings, are a hopeless enigma—the subtlest, most audacious fraud ever perpetrated on human credulity. The writers, ostensibly good men, are engaged in the most shameless and cruel conspiracy against human instincts and hopes; and the moral and religious elevation of their writings—surpassing far even those of a Plato, and bearing the tests of nineteen Christian centuries,—is the greatest para-

dox of human history. It is far easier to accept the supernaturalism of the Bible than to reject it. Just as it is far easier to believe in a divine Creator of the universe than to be an Atheist.

If in this soul of mine there be any capability of recognising the voice of truth when it speaks, or the light of truth when it shines, then is this blessed book the truth; for it speaks to all that is deepest and highest in me—all that I most need and aspire to, all that most satisfies me. It finds me in the secret places of my soul; and never so much as when it tells me of the forgiveness of my sins through Christ, of the new spiritual life of the Holy Spirit, of the divine fellowship and love to which I am solicited.

If in its supernatural claims the Bible be a falsehood or a superstition, then it comes to this, that not only are my noblest moral faculties, my most spiritual instincts befooled, but these unwarranted teachings of the Bible—its mistakes about God's transcendent thoughts and purposes, His supernatural providence, His redemption through Jesus Christ, His spiritual fellowship and love—have done more to elevate, sanctify, and bless men than all the truth that the world possesses. If the Bible be not a divine book in a sense which is true of no other book, then it is the greatest imposture in its claims, and the greatest paradox in its effects that the world has seen. It deceives our highest spiritual sense, and yet it produces our noblest spiritual character. On the simple ground of common-sense philosophy, this is incredible. I cannot, therefore, without discrediting every rational test of truth, without belying the noblest faculties of my nature, doubt that a divine voice, the voice of the God of infinite truth and love, speaks to me in its pages.

Equally certain is it that the men who speak to me are men of like passions with myself. Each writer speaks to me in his own proper voice, with his own distinctive form of thought, with his own deep beating human heart.

Whatever the divine inspiration may be, it does not overbear the human characteristics of the writers—the passionate fervour of David, the imaginative sublimity of Isaiah, the spiritual insight of John, the practical religiousness of James, the metaphysical theology and the fervid and manifold sympathies of Paul. When David sings to me about his penitence and yearnings, and Paul tells me about his hopes and fears, I must believe that it is a proper man, pouring out to me his full and fervid human soul. The insufferable thought that it is an automaton that the inspiring Spirit moves, an instrument upon which the inspiring Spirit plays, a human individuality that the inspiring Spirit imitates, revolts me. Not only is it impossible to my reverence, but it would rob the Bible of its precious human sympathies. The Bible is not a table of doctrines and precepts written by the divine finger on stone; it is a history of human souls, of human experiences, under the progressive revelation of God—an incarnation in human lives of the great redeeming thoughts and processes of God.

This is all that I know about the inspiration of the Bible writers; it is all that I need or care to know. I cannot doubt that God speaks through them, neither can I doubt that they speak in the exercise of their own thoughts and feelings. If I be asked how much of what they say is supernatural, and how much is merely human, I do not know. In the very nature of the case I cannot possibly know, any more than I can in the being of the incarnate Christ. Both elements are there,

and I may be sure that the divine element will be connected with no human element that is morally false. I can depend upon every great theological teaching as being infallible. I am sure that every writer is an absolutely truthful man. He may be scientifically ignorant; he may have imperfect knowledge about many minor things; he may share the impressions and the misconceptions of his time; he may be neither a scientific geologist, nor an accurate statistician, nor an infallible historian. We cannot imagine a supernatural anticipation of physical science; but he is divinely qualified to tell me the true thoughts and purposes of God about holiness, sin, and salvation, and I ask no more.

What, then, shall I say about the practical power of the Bible—the religious profitableness of the Scripture, that thus comes to me with the authority of supernatural inspiration?

I look at the Bible in its own intrinsic qualities, and I look at human history in the light of its actual religious influence. Volumes might be written in illustration of the “profitableness” which the Apostle here attributes to it. I can utter only a few sentences.

The range and variety of its profitableness is to be noted. It is a book for human life—not for churches nor for devotions only, but for every domain and relationship of human beings.

It is “profitable for doctrine,”—for teaching true ideas or principles of religious life. It makes men “wise unto salvation.” Men feel and act according to the thoughts and sentiments they entertain. We sometimes hear men making light of what they call dogma—of notions, as such, concerning God, and Christ, and salvation. A man, it is truly said, cannot be saved by a creed how-

ever accurate, by a theology however true. His salvation consists not in his right notions, but in his religious heart—in his pure, loving soul. Well, no truth can be more obvious. But men have so long and so largely tested a man's religiousness by the orthodoxy of his creed rather than by the qualities of his heart and life, that in revolt from this they are prone to go to the opposite extreme, and to think of goodness as altogether independent of belief.

But no wise man will undervalue correct theological notions ; they are indispensable conditions of goodness. A man is practically good in proportion as his ideas and principles are true. He is not good simply because of his ideas : he may resist their inspirations ; but if he be good his ideas determine the quality and the measure of his goodness. The inspiration of Christian ideas is greater than the inspiration of pagan ideas. One man with heterodox beliefs may be better than another man who is orthodox in his beliefs ; but he would be better still if his beliefs were true. Error can do no man good, and may do much harm. To say the least, it hinders whatever power of inspiration there may be in truth ; and it often has in itself inspirations which are inconsistent with those of truth.

Our feelings about God will depend upon our notions of God. If I think of God as imperfect in moral goodness, or as a selfish and tyrannous potentate, or as a stern and severe exacter, I shall not love Him as I should if I thought of Him as a holy, tender, self-sacrificing Father. If I think of Jesus Christ as merely a good man, setting me a holy example of life and of self-sacrifice, I cannot possibly love Him, serve Him, worship Him as I do when I think of Him as the incarnate Son of God, taking upon Himself the condi-

tions of my human life, and dying upon the cross to redeem me. In both cases the beliefs may be perfectly sincere, and may be practically inspiring; but, in the very necessity of the conditions, the power of the inspiration is much less in the one case than it is in the other. In every instance in which Paul avows the passion of his consecration to Christ, he connects its inspiration distinctively with His cross. "He loved me and gave Himself for me." The religious feeling and the religious service of every section of Christendom have been powerfully influenced by its distinctive beliefs about God and about Christ.

According to the Apostle the Scriptures are the distinctive source of our theological teaching. True doctrines concerning God and religion are revealed in the Bible.

Something about God I may learn from the phenomena of the material creation—its provisions, processes, and laws. Paul specifies God's "eternal power and Godhead" as the doctrine which creation teaches. Something about God we may learn from our own spiritual nature, our moral instincts, our religious consciousness; enough, Paul thought, to leave the heathen without excuse for their idolatry and vice. Here Paul speaks only of the Old Testament Scriptures; and it is to be especially noted that he affirms of these not only that they are thus profitable, but that they are able to "make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He calls them "the Holy Scriptures," the only time that the designation occurs in the New Testament; and he clearly thinks that the Scriptures of the Old Testament are sufficient to lead men to a saving faith in Christ.

No one will dispute that the loftiest, the most

spiritual, the most inspiring notions about God and religious life that we possess are taught by the Scriptures, including, as we can include, the marvellous teachings about Jesus Christ in the New Testament. However these writers came to be possessed of them, their teachings about God and Christ, about spiritual life and sanctity, about human brotherhood and benevolence, about the providence of life here, and about the life to come, do infinitely transcend all other teachings.

The demonstration is in what without the Bible the world has ever been—Egypt, Assyria, Greece and Rome, China and Africa : nay, I will say, in what the sceptical philosophies of modern times produce. Whether true or not, the ideas of the Bible are, to say the least, more noble and inspiring than the ideas of sceptical materialism. They do not resolve the Creator into an unintelligent first cause ; they do not assign to man's moral nature an arboreal brute for his ancestor, and a mere physical development for its evolution ; they do not exclude God from the government of His world by making Him the creature of His own laws ; they do not rob life of a personal providence, and quench its hope of immortality. Sceptical science may be right, and the Bible may be wrong, but clearly the lower, the degrading doctrines are not those of the Bible. For the elevation of my own thoughts, for the inspiration, sanctity, and blessedness of my own life, I will, so long as I can, believe in the doctrines of the Bible. They are the more "profitable." And if the time should ever come when I am compelled to surrender these beliefs, I shall feel in my surrender, first, that nature has made a great blunder in giving me a moral and spiritual soul, which there is neither God, nor Christ, nor immortality to satisfy ; and next, that this dishonoured book—the

errors of which are demonstrated, and which I have to renounce—has nevertheless given to mankind the very noblest conceptions, the very holiest inspirations that it possesses ; that its errors are more elevating and potent than all the world's admitted truth.

Thank God, I have not come to this yet. I do not believe that I ever shall. Whatever else may be or may not be in the book, it is profitable for religious doctrine ; and will be until this spiritual nature of mine is either silenced or destroyed, and its spiritual needs of purity, divine fellowship, and comfort are no longer felt. The philosophies of the world change, science is ever learning and correcting its errors, but "the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

The fatal cause of men's chief errors is the disparagement or disregard of the simple teaching of Scripture, and the efficient corrective of them is a simple return to it. He is the best champion of truth who is mightiest in the Scripture. "To the law and to the testimony, if they be not according to them, it is because there is no truth in them."

The other great idea of the profitableness of Scripture is represented by the words, "reproof," "correction."

What power of holy influence can be compared with that of the Bible ? Its precepts rise to the sublimest ideals of moral purity and integrity. Its histories and delineations of character, although often of the greatest sin, and necessarily representing contemporary conceptions and feelings, never fail of the highest and purest moral influence upon the reader.

What book in the world surrounds recitals of sin with such an atmosphere of purity ? It is as it were an

indictment of sin at the very bar of God himself. And towering in moral sublimity, high above all, are the holy teachings and the perfect example of Jesus Christ. His teachings spiritualise the precepts of the moral law, and establish them in the very soul itself. His life idealises them, exhibits perfect goodness in a form of entrancing beauty, makes holiness an object of passion and of worship. He was as perfect on earth as God is perfect in Heaven. What that the loftiest thought or virtue of man has produced can be placed by the side of the perfect character of Jesus Christ? Imagination itself cannot conceive a greater inspiration of human lives.

And it is not the least part of the moral miracle of the Bible that, while throughout the fifteen hundred years which the composition of its different books covers, it portrays the changing and advancing religiousness of man, its own morality is one. The moral purity of Genesis is as distinct as that of John's Gospel, the Psalms are as holy as the Epistles of Paul. Its conceptions of God and of human relations to Him, its teachings of moral and religious character are a consistent but ever-developing unity around which the varying history plays.

What book again has such a religious history as the Bible? Who may speak its moral and spiritual triumphs over men and nations, its recognised and unrecognised influence? It has transformed pagan nations as no other moral power has done. In our own time we have seen savage tribes civilised and made humane and virtuous by its inspiration. A page or two of one of the Gospels sustains the persecuted Malagasy for years; and, unaided by Christian teachers, multiplies the disciples tenfold, elevates them to a moral purity that would not suffer by comparison with that of our own

Christian Churches, and inspires them with the fidelity and heroism of martyrs. How easy it would be to connect with its inspirations the noblest virtues, the most philanthropic achievements, the pervading sentiment of our own and of other Western nations.

How quick and powerful it is in the hearts of individual men! Who of us does not know instances—some of us hundreds—in which it has pierced sinful hearts like a sword, broken hard hearts like a hammer, burnt up the dross of foul hearts like a fire; brought even the most reprobate to penitence and prayer; broken the power of indurated habit that nothing else could touch? How often a single saying of the holy book has proved a solvent of the hardest heart—a spell producing the most amazing transformations! Think of its presence and power in men's daily consciences and lives! What a quiet but potent moral influence it has, as we hear it read on Sundays, or at morning and evening worship, or as we quietly peruse it in our closets. Is there any moral force on earth that at the present moment is exerting so mighty and so manifold a religious power?

Be the book historically what it may, come whence it may, this moral and religious ministry to men cannot be denied it; and it is the most conclusive evidence of its divine authority. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth."

Need I speak of its ministry to the sorrows of human life? What a mighty influence upon every interest and experience of a man it is exerting! How it meets our deep and disabling consciousness of sin by its marvellous redemption! How it transfigures the care and sorrow of life by its teachings of the personal and loving providence of the Heavenly Father, by its assurances of His

wise and gracious discipline! It makes sorrow itself a gospel. How it induces and perfects patience, even in bereavement, by its assurance that it is but for "a little while," and asks our very love to "rejoice, because they go to the Father"!

Every day some word of this ineffable book speaks to myriads of human hearts desperately struggling with the difficulties of life, overwhelmed by its misfortunes, helpless on sick-beds and racked by pain, forsaken of friends, bereaved of those dearest to them; to prisoners in gaols; to shipwrecked mariners clinging for a moment to a precarious spar; to men and women bidding farewell to the tender relations of life.

What would our life be without the Bible? What old pagan life was—reckless in Epicureanism, brutal in Stoicism, finding the solution of its ills in suicide. This, too, the Bible may claim—it is the great comforter of sorrowful men.

Nor can its sufficiency be impaired by any intellectual or social advance. Through the three thousand years of its history the noblest and purest have found in it their highest inspirations. How rapturously David sang the sufficiency of the few fragments of it that he possessed! Nor will the noblest and holiest sage or saint of our own day hesitate to say that its nurture is yet as transcendent and affluent for his highest thought, his greatest aspirations. Like the holy Christ Himself, all fulness dwells in it. However far and however rapidly the world may advance in intellectual wisdom, in moral culture, in spiritual attainment, the Bible will ever be its highest source of inspiration and comfort.

What? What then should be our feelings towards a book which has such a character and such a history? As-

surely we need have no fears about its authority or its reputation.

Let criticism search out its sources and history, and analyze its contents : we gladly welcome all its indubitable conclusions. God's truth needs no lie for its support. Every conclusion hitherto has "turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel." Nothing is so injurious to truth as false arguments and supports. }

So long as the Bible remains the greatest moral force, the grandest inspiration, the holiest nurture of human lives, the moral sentiment of men will enthrone it. The Bible must live ; not, I will reverently say, because it claims a supernatural inspiration, not because a supernatural Providence will watch over it—both we believe ; but, supremely, because it is spiritually and religiously pure, because it contains truths that our spiritual and religious nature needs—truths which no other book contains, and which it contains because it is the word of the Lord : therefore it "liveth and abideth for ever."

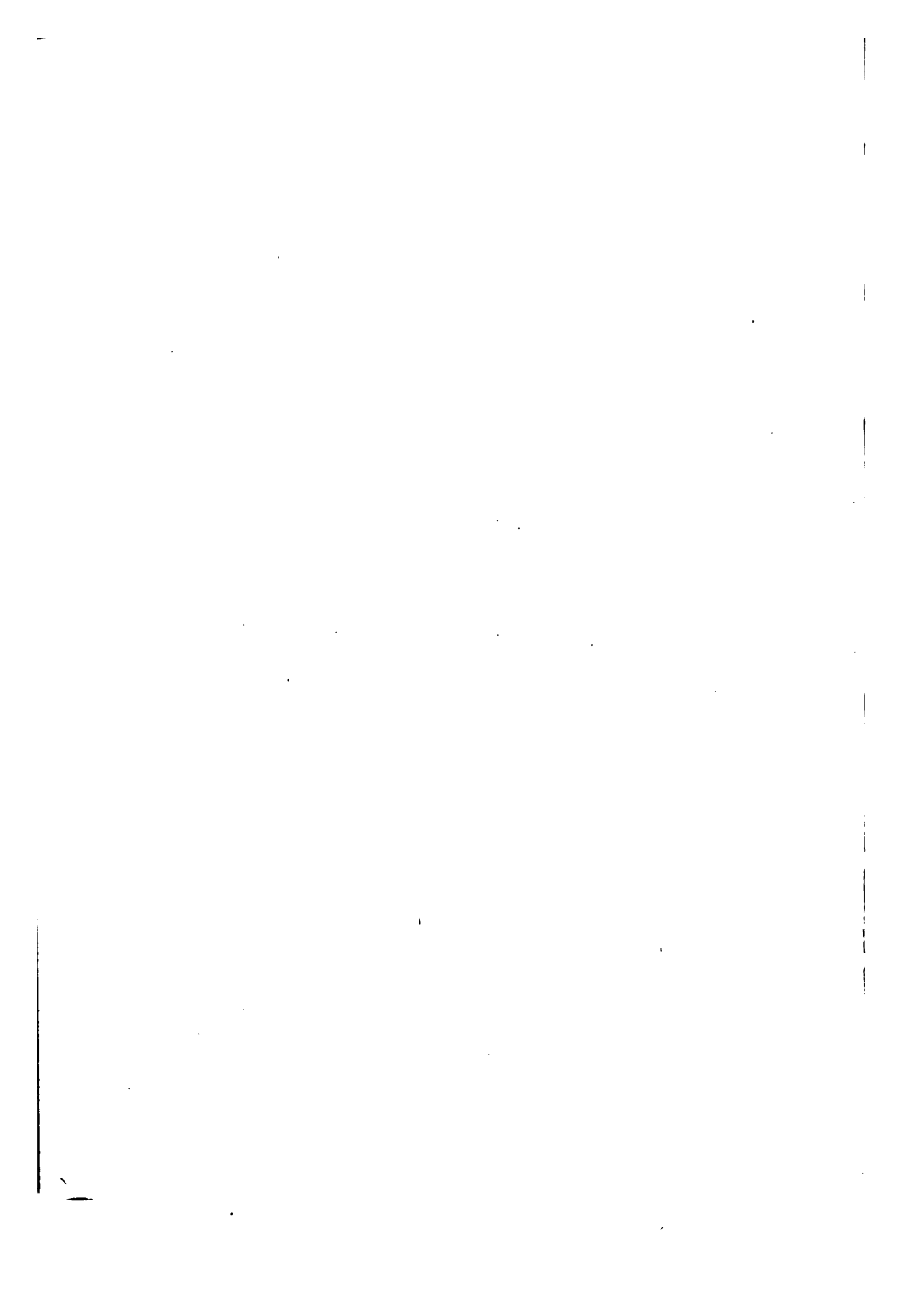
Let our little timid souls rise to faith in spiritual truth, in its moral power, and therefore in its permanency. A book that has a past like that of the Bible must have a future, so long as God is God and man is man. As a book of moral and religious truth only will it live ; as such only need we wish it to live. So long as human souls feel sin and sorrow, so long will they prize the salvation and comfort of the Scripture.

Let us use it, then, for the nurture of our own religious life, make it the "man of our counsel," "hide it in our hearts," subject ourselves to its manifold and blessed influences.

With some of us, alas, into what a household com-

monness, a superstitious ritual, it has fallen, so that we read it as if it were a charm! Let us search out its thoughts, ply the necessities of our life with its fitting ideas; so will it speak to us with a pertinence and power of inspiration and of fruitfulness that shall demonstrate how "profitable" it is, how able to make us practically "wise unto salvation."

CHRISTIAN CERTAINTY.



CHRISTIAN CERTAINTY.

"I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."
2 Tim. i. 12.

IT is refreshing in these days of hesitancy and doubt to hear such a note of certainty as rings in this avowal. It is a characteristic note of the New Testament writers. Their intellectual strength, their freedom from fanaticism cannot be questioned; and yet they are never doubtful about Christianity; their conviction is always distinct, strong, and imperturbable.

Christianity is not a mere science, to be proved by intellectual reasonings. Christian beliefs are not mere theological opinions; they rest on the consciousness of life, the vital experiences of the believing man. To the New Testament writers Christ was much more than a theological teacher—He was the source and nurture of their conscious religious life. They were "men in Christ"; Christ was in them their "hope of glory." "I live, nay, not I, it is Christ who liveth in me." "I am the vine; ye are the branches." "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

So that the New Testament writers are not so much inquirers concerning Christianity as testifiers of it. They do not teach a doctrine merely, they declare an experience. They never try to assure themselves. They do not argue as if they were doubtful; they do not asseverate as if they were afraid. When they speak about Christ, and about salvation in Him, they speak about what they have personally "handled and tasted." And they are always confident, enthusiastic, jubilant. They manifestly rest in indubitable conclusions, both of intellect and heart. The life has proved the doctrine; they are virtually one with Christ, in life and in death.

We never, for instance, find them speculating in a metaphysical way about God, or moral being, or the hereafter, as Plato did, as modern philosophers do. They are never troubled with scientific difficulties, such as have so large a place in the thinking of our day; in which physical science so urges the imperativeness of its methods, and the supremacy of its laws, and so peremptorily denies the supernatural, and even the validity of moral evidence, that we are sometimes ready to doubt whether in this universe of things there really be any existence but matter, or any evidence but that of the senses. Even pious men at times half suspect the validity of their own belief in God, in the soul, in Christ as the Redeemer of men.

Now, are we warranted in pooh-poohing the strong beliefs of these Christian witnesses? Are they really the inspiration of religious fanaticism; was the apostolic age really so credulous and superstitious as is sometimes affirmed? The literature of the time shows that substantially the same mysteries, the same problems of life, perplexed men then, and were subjects of eager discussion. Only these New Testament writers speak as

if they had penetrated these mysteries—resolved these problems—as if, concerning them, they had attained a certainty in which both mind and heart could rest.

If the evidence be satisfactory, it is a very enviable condition of thought and feeling. There are, to-day, thousands of men and women sincerely struggling with difficulties and agonized by doubts, who would give all that they possessed to attain such rest of faith. Can these Christian believers impart to us their secret? Are the grounds of their confidence intelligent and demonstrable? Are they such as ordinary men may share? Who are the men who so confidently believed Jesus to be the Christ? What were the conditions of their faith? What was the evidence that convinced them?

The problems which make religious faith difficult have always perplexed the thought of the world. Chaldaean magi, Egyptian sages, Grecian and Roman philosophers had all speculated concerning them. They are no peculiarities of the advancing thought and science of modern times. In almost every direction metaphysical and materialistic scepticism had been pushed in the old world as far as they are pushed now. It is suggestive enough that, notwithstanding the great advances of modern science, there is scarcely a sceptical theory of our own day that is not substantially a reproduction of old speculations. A thousand times refuted by the after-thought of men, it simply reappears—like a ghost, “revisiting the glimpses of the moon,” a pale and thin reflection of the life that it represents. One is tempted to say of modern infidelity that it lacks novelty. And so it will ever be as long as men reject God’s solution of these difficulties in the revelations of the Bible.

The Christian age was anything but a credulous

age. The Augustan period of literature was just closing. Almost every form of thought, of speculation, of genius, had found in it high expression. Keen criticism, bold hypotheses, defiant infidelity, were everywhere. Pilate was only the representative of a widely-diffused and despondent scepticism—agnostics, such would call themselves now, who, in utterly baffled thought, maintain that truth about God and about spiritual things is unattainable. Lucretius died fifty years before Christ was born.

Although the Jews were a religious and meditative, rather than a metaphysical people, the books of Job and Ecclesiastes are among their sacred literature; and after the conquests of Alexander and the Romans, they were probably affected by Greek and Roman thought. Their own great Rabbis, Hillel, Simeon, and Gamaliel, were men of large philosophical thought, deeply imbued with Gentile culture. Among Jewish parties there was the sceptical sect of the Sadducees, attesting the presence and prevalence of sceptical thought. It was not, therefore, so easy for a religious teacher to establish fanatical or superstitious doctrines. As among all religious nations, there were, no doubt, visionaries enough, sometimes leading men to fanatical excesses.

But although political passion was very strong, and these men had the great hope of the Messiah to conjure with, they could win for their teachings no wide or permanent acceptance; they were mere bubbles or eddies on the broad stream of life. The singular exception was the rapid prevalence and depth of Christian belief.

The two great teachers of Christianity, Jesus and Paul, were, to say the least, scarcely men amenable to the charge of fanaticism. Not to insist upon the higher claims of Jesus Christ, no one can question the clear,

strong, well-balanced character of His intellect. Whatever test may be applied, it was one of the few imperial intellects of the world's history. Neither can there be any question concerning the lofty, spiritual, catholic character of His ideas. "Never man spake like this man." Neither in Him, nor in His teaching, is there the faintest trace of fanatical feeling or idea. True or false, where can we find a religious philosophy so profound and so broad, a religious morality so pure and so unconventional, a religious sentiment so spiritual, so manly, and so potent? Who has so ruled the noblest intellects and the greatest lives of men? His teaching, judged by the highest intellectual and moral tests that we know, is at the present moment supreme amongst men.

And concerning Saul of Tarsus, it must be admitted that he was both an accomplished scholar and a great thinker; the acknowledged leader of theological and philosophical thought amongst his co-religionists, and the designated successor of Gamaliel as chief of the Pharisaic party. Pre-eminently is he the theologian of the new Christianity. The impress of his lofty thought and regal imagination is upon it. Sometimes, indeed, his enthusiasm carries him away, but enthusiasm is not fanaticism. All great and good men are enthusiasts.

It is worth noticing that the leaders of the two great Biblical religions, Moses and Paul, were both of them men of distinctive genius, and of a culture broader than that of their own nation. Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," Paul was imbued with the best culture of Greece and Rome. So that only gross ignorance or inexcusable recklessness will attribute to fanaticism the religious certainty of Moses and Paul. Whatever the grounds of their assurance, they were such as satisfied two of the im-

perial intellects of the world, one of them that of a highly-cultured scholar.

Can we, then, from this avowal of the Apostle, gather any indications of the true grounds of Christian confidence?

Paul was now an old man—"Paul the aged," as he designates himself, although probably he was not more than sixty-three when he was put to death. He was a prisoner in Rome, expecting his martyrdom. For more than thirty years he had been a Christian Apostle. He is "now ready to be offered up, and the time of his departure is at hand." This is his last apostolic letter, and he entreats Timothy to come to him that he may once more see him before he dies. He therefore writes in circumstances that severely test a man. His Christian advocacy has brought him to this. For Christ's sake he has "suffered the loss of all things." His Christian discipleship has brought upon him almost every calamity that can befall a man. Even his Christian companions seem to have sought their own safety by flight: "Only Luke is with me." Few men had tested Christianity as he had done.

First, by the repeated investigations of a peculiarly keen intellect—in Damascus, in Arabia, in Athens, and through thirty years of profound exposition and keen controversy;

Next, by the sacrifice for it of possessions and prospects the most attractive to an ardent, aspiring nature like his;

Thirdly, by endurances for it such as few undergo—"stripes, imprisonments, deaths oft." "We are counted the filth and offscouring of all men." And now he stands face to face with the last great test of fidelity to conviction—he is about to die for his beliefs.

And throughout the letter there is not one dubious estimate, one faltering avowal. Not only is his Christian assurance confident, it exults, it vaunts itself. There is no mistaking the tone of this his final verdict upon Christianity :—"I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

The very phraseology indicates the strength and enthusiasm of his faith. "I know *Him* whom I have believed." "He is able to guard *that* which I have committed unto Him against *that* day." He does not need to be more explicit; pronouns suffice. It is impossible that Timothy can mistake his reference. To whom can he refer but to the Christ? What can he have committed unto Him but his soul and his interests? To what day can he refer but to the day of Christ's coming—the Parousia—when the crown of glory shall be put upon the victor?

What, then, was the secret of this old man's confidence? Nor of his only; for through all the Christian ages this has been the precise exultation of myriads of Christian believers?

May I say that, through the course of my own ministry, lengthened now far beyond the term of Paul's, and during which I have seen hundreds of Christian men and women more imminently facing death than Paul now was—some feeling the very chill of his touch, others absolutely certain of his nearness—I am unable to recall one instance, save where disease has palpably disordered thought and feeling, where such Christian certainty has not been the predominant feeling. Many strangely exultant, jubilant feeling overpowering all sense of physical pain, all affectionate yearnings, all domestic sorrow; songs of salvation breaking from

their lips, a radiance of ethereal rapture upon their countenance. "If," said good Henry Townley, the Indian missionary, to me, a few hours before his death, "if God were to give me more happiness, I could not bear it." Others I have seen, less rapturous, but calm and confident, "fearing no evil;" a few groping in the first darkness of the valley, faltering in the first depths of the river, "fearing as they entered the cloud," but soon recovering light and faith and spiritual vision; not one, I think, with whom assurance failed.

It is not, therefore, a mere legend of the ages of faith. It is the confidence of ordinary men and women, who live and die amongst ourselves; some of them, like Mr. Townley, familiar with the subtle speculations of philosophical and materialistic infidelity. If, therefore, it can be discovered, the secret is worth knowing.

What, then, is the true ground of Christian certainty, and how may ordinary men and women attain to it?

It may seem a truism to say that absolute confidence in the presence of death can be inspired only by Christian beliefs. And yet it is worth saying it for the sake of the contrast between the practical power of Christian teachings and that of all other systems—whether they be the infidelity of philosophical rationalism, or the superstitions of other religious systems.

If there be any practical value in religious assurances, any moral strength of life, any comfort in death, it is worth while to note that only Christian faith can inspire them. Of course, if a man formally reject all religious beliefs, if it be his theory of life that there is no God, no incarnate Christ, no redemption from sin, no life hereafter, religious confidence is impossible; his theories do not admit of it, his religious sense does not demand it. His certainty is, that nothing but matter exists,

and that physical death will be the extinction of all conscious existence. He may profess, perhaps he may think, that he has attained contentedness with this. But mere negation is a poor inspiration of happiness; the denial of life hereafter is a poor substitute for the inspiring hope of it.

Stoicism is a hard, often a brutal thing. Human nature so resents it that few ever attain to it. The sorrowful wail, the pathetic despair, inscribed on pagan tombs, indicate the terrible desolation and anguish of human hearts that have no religious consolations.

It is only a modification of Atheism that designates itself Agnosticism. Both are negations—We do not believe; we do not know. Agnosticism will not affirm that God, the soul, life hereafter, do not exist; it simply does not know whether they exist or not.

There is no novelty in this attitude of thought. One of Plato's affirmations was that it was impossible to attain to any certain knowledge. Three hundred years before Christ a school of Greek philosophy, known as Pyrrhonism, was founded upon Plato's assumption, that the attainment of truth was impossible. The flippant scepticism of Pilate took this form. He thought to silence the King of Truth by the hopeless question, "What is truth?"—a word merely thrown out, to which he expected no answer, because he believed no answer to be possible.

We are all Agnostics at some point; we must somewhere bow in reverence before the unknowable. The culpability of much that calls itself Agnosticism is that it shuts its eyes to the light that has come into the world, and insanely calls it darkness.

I wish, however, to say only that if I really can have no certain knowledge concerning God, whether He is,

or what He is ; if I can have no assurance concerning the Christ, whether he be the incarnate Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, who died for its sin, who rose from the dead, and "opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers ;" if I can attain no certainty concerning a future existence and the condition of the soul hereafter, everything like religious inspiration in the presence of death is clearly impossible. Negations cannot inspire faith ; peradventures can give no courage nor inspiration ; unknown possibilities only appal. Atheism itself, as a condition of life, were preferable to this insoluble doubt, this perpetual questioning of the eternal silences. Better to know the worst than hopelessly to doubt concerning the best.

If we ask the religions of the world, is there one that can inspire a feeling in the presence of death like this Christian confidence ?

What inspiration can there be in the Nirvana of the Buddhist, whether it be the absorption of all conscious being in the Deity, or the extinction of all conscious desire in the man ? What certainty is there even in the lotty speculations and probabilities of Plato ? He only knows who proves. Socrates dies like a sage. The Stoic finds the apotheosis of life in suicide ; Mohammedanism in a fierce enthusiasm of faith and lust ; what nobility is there in a Mohammedan paradise ?

Can any of these conceptions be compared with the luminous hope, the calm strength, the holy anticipations, the satisfying assurance of the Christian Heaven ?

Be the teaching of Jesus Christ true or false, it may fairly claim as its prerogative that it alone conquers death, takes from it its sting, subordinates it to the highest interests of life ; makes it the very condition of the noblest life—"that which thou sowest is not quick-

ened except it die." "Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The Apostle does not rest his certainty upon an ethical basis, a feeling of personal goodness. He does not say, "I am sure of Heaven, because I have been a good man, an earnest seeker after truth, faithful to my convictions, and conscientious in my conduct. I have always chosen the pure and the noble, and by patient processes of fidelity and self-discipline have built up a holy religious character." He does not put it in this way even when he speaks of what Christ has done for him. "I expect Heaven because of the holiness which Christ has enabled me to attain, because of the true religious doctrine which he has taught me, the holy example which he has set me, the inspirations of a noble life with which he has filled me."

Of course, it is our first instinct, it is the fundamental teaching of Christianity, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "There entereth not into it anything that defileth." No man more strenuously insisted upon holiness as the essential qualification for Heaven than the Apostle Paul did. But he never presents it in this way. Had this been his thought, he would surely have expressed his obligation to Christ in different terms. "I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed to Him against that day."

In Paul's theory of salvation by Christ, personal holiness never takes the place of a meritorious cause. It is simply the fruit and expression of Christ's great gift of life. In his letter to the Philippians he gives us the full formula of his hope and assurance—"That I may be

found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Clearly his ground of certainty is not any moral quality in himself, however wrought; but Christ, and what Christ had done for him. No one familiar with Paul's writings can imagine him forming such an estimate of his own goodness as to rest his hope of Heaven upon it.

Here, again, Christianity, the highest holiness that we know, is at issue concerning the grounds of salvation with the strong assertions of mere ethical religiousness. It sounds very plausible and very religious to affirm that a man's admission to Heaven is conditioned upon his own goodness. And the Christian teaching which makes it dependent upon something else is sometimes denounced as inimical to true morals; that is, the loftiest holiness that men know is represented as produced by immoral ideas. However this may be, the theory of the salvation by good works is diametrically opposed to the avowal, the strenuous arguments, and the entire consciousness of the Apostle Paul.

As an illustration of the difference, take this note of one of our modern poets:—

"Once read thy own heart right,
And thou hast done with fears;
Man gets no other light,
Search he a thousand years.
Sink in thyself: there ask
What ails thee—at that shrine."

Probably the writer of these lines would refuse to acknowledge in Paul any special authority as a teacher of true religious thought. Hardly, however, can he question his competence as a well-informed exponent of Christian ideas. So that if it be the true theory of reli-

gion that personal goodness is the only ground of a man's salvation, then Christianity is fundamentally and dangerously untrue in its theory of salvation by grace.

And is not the Christian theory corroborated by our own religious consciousness? Where is the man whose conscious ethical goodness can inspire an exulting certainty like this? All human experience negatives the sufficiency of the religious self for such an assurance; while all Christian experience attests the sufficiency of Christ for inspiring it. The truly self-conscious man will seek to be saved from his dubious imperfect self, and "count all things but loss if he may but be found in Christ."

Assuredly Paul's note of confidence is not anything that he "read in his own heart." To say the least, he imagined that he got light and help and certainty from Christ. His assurance of salvation was rooted in something that Christ had done for him, in something that Christ was to him. And it gave him a certainty which no man ever yet evolved out of his own unaided religious consciousness. "I know *Him* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him unto that day."

Nor does Paul derive his certainty from any imaginative hopes of the eschatologist. He does not say, "I know that I shall be saved because God is too pitiful to permit any one to be lost. He will give me a second probation after death; He will so work upon men by His irresistible grace, as that, sooner or later, every soul of man shall be redeemed."

It may be so; the speculation cannot be tested here. I simply remark that no allusion to such a possibility as a ground of his hope is made by the Apostle. He often discusses the terrible problem of human sin, its origin,

intensity, and issues. He often insists upon Christ's salvation from sin. Is there a single instance in which he alludes to universalism as a ground of personal hope? Does he ever suggest that, even if men die impenitent in this world, they will not only have another chance in the next, but such a chance as that, without exception, every human soul will be saved? Is not this the precarious optimism of an uninformed sentiment, rather than an intelligent conviction necessitated by the actual evidence?

It is not for any of us dogmatically to say what is possible beyond the grave; least of all are we justified in asserting absolutely that every man will be saved. In our necessary ignorance of what will be beyond death, we are limited to the teachings of revelation. Can any presumption be greater than to construct a solution of the dark mystery of evil out of arbitrary assumptions as to what, according to our uninstructed thought, the God of love may or must do? With our imperfect moral conceptions, with the stubborn facts of man's actual moral history and condition behind us and around us, we should surely be diffident in pronouncing upon the necessities of God's ways of love. That the loving Father cannot be cruel or relentless, that He cannot be the remorseless gaoler and tormentor represented in the mediæval Hell of painters, poets and theologians—who have so daringly put literal meanings upon figurative representations of Scripture—we may certainly conclude. The holy and loving Father cannot do what all that is best in our religious nature would revolt from. Against all such theories of the hereafter we are bound to protest: they deny the very character of God.

But are we competent to prescribe the ways of His love? Should it not make us diffident to remember

that the God of love has permitted evil in His creatures? There were "angels who kept not their first estate." And, amongst men, evil has wrought its indescribable tragedies of woe. The supreme problem of evil lies not in its issues but in its origin. Could any one of us have conceived such a possibility when the Almighty Father said, "Let us make man in our image"?

Even the providential evils of life are urged against His love. Men like John Stuart Mill have contended that, if the universe be not an accidental concurrence of atoms, its condition as it is, with its permitted physical and moral evils, is both a blunder and a wrong.

To a reverent man, the simple fact that such evils continue in this world should surely check dogmatism concerning what *must be* in another. That the retributions of sin here are so terrible may well make us doubt whether we understand all the possibilities of God's holy love.

Grave questions have to be asked and answered. Has God made such a mistake in the conditions of our moral life here as that He will have to redress them by the easier conditions of another probation hereafter? When the inducements of Christ's Gospel have failed here, are they likely to be effectual hereafter, when men have grown reprobate in evil, when evil is not, as here, incipient and partial, but, through a long course of wrongdoing has grown to be pervading and indurate? Or will the great laws of moral causation be interfered with, so that the persistent wrongdoer shall not become reprobate, and men shall not reap as they have sown? Or will God interfere with the inalienable prerogative of moral freedom, and in some way make it impossible that any single individual shall finally persist in evil—which would destroy virtue itself? For there can be no holi-

ness where there is no power of sinning. Or will additional potency be given to the Gospel which appeals, and if so, what? Or will additional constraint be put upon the will and the affections appealed to, and that so effectually that every individual soul will be converted?

I must confess that my entire moral apprehension and philosophy are bewildered by such suppositions. The Scripture is our only source of knowledge concerning the future. Are its expressions and representations of finality—not only concerning man but fallen angels also—from the terrible words of Christ himself to the final visions of the Apocalypse—so equivocal, that they really mean the very opposite to what to all unsophisticated readers they seem to mean? I could not feel moral or religious respect for an oracle so ambiguous and misleading. What are we to make of the stern sayings of Him with whose tenderness of yearning pity ours cannot compare? Whatever may be the final solution of the great problem of moral evil, it does not seem to lie in this direction. Can we not leave the dread issue with Him? Assuredly He who spake concerning sinners the most yearning words of divine love, and concerning the final doom of the impenitent the most solemn words that the New Testament contains, may be safely trusted to vindicate the ways of His own infinite love. He does not need that in the name of His love we should confuse our own moral sense and the meaning of what He seems plainly to teach. I do not know how the mystery of impenitent sin will be solved, but I do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor does this strong and persistent confidence of the Apostle find its reason in mere religious excitement, in the visions of religious imagination, in the fervours of religious passion. There is no reason for us to dis-

allow or disparage these. Excess of fervour is not the characteristic sin of modern religious life. But indications of such religious ecstasy are singularly rare in the New Testament. Its calm, intelligent, religious temper is scarcely congruous with great excitements, which are fraught with their own peculiar perils.

Such confidence as the Apostle avows is clearly the product of only intelligent testimony, of clear conviction, of long and diversified experience of Christian life.

It is impossible to imagine Paul surrendering himself to the febrile ecstatic pietism which is the only sufficiency of some men's religious life. Nor, on the other hand, can we think of him as holding his relations to Christ in a solution of perpetual doubt. "I am not quite sure about my salvation, whether or not I have accepted Christ, whether or not Christ is living in me 'the hope of glory.' I hope that it is so, but I dare not affirm it."

There can be no strong exulting certainty in mere peradventure. If immortal hope is to be assured to a man, his present life in Christ must be certain. "I know Him whom I have believed."

It must be added that the Apostle makes no reference to what are called "the external evidences of Christianity," nor to any doctrinal or intellectual proofs of it. The place of these is in establishing the great facts and general truths of Christianity to men generally; as notably when Paul demonstrates to the Corinthians the reality of the resurrection of Christ. In the formation of intelligent convictions about Christ and Christianity, these have an indispensable place.

But the Apostle is not here avouching his certainty of the truth of Christianity, but the certainty of his personal salvation by Christ. The demonstration that Chris-

tianity is true does not prove that I am personally saved by Christ.

It comes, then, to this : the evidence upon which the Apostle relies is solely that of his personal experience of Christ. "I know Him whom I have believed." I know what He is whom I have trusted ; what my personal realizations of Him have been ; what in my practical religious life I have found Him to be—what a light and a life ; what an inspiration and a strength ; what a sufficiency and a comfort ! All my experiences of Him have been assuring. I have never sought Him, put Him to a practical test, but I have found Him to be more than even imagination could have dreamed.

"And this experience of what He has been is my sufficient assurance of what He will continue to be. I know what I have committed to Him, and how He has justified the entrustment. I can, therefore, implicitly leave myself in His hands, trust Him body and soul, for life and for death."

This is the only valid ground for the certainty of final salvation—the consciousness of present life in Christ. There is no evidence so indubitable as this. I do not ask external testimony. I do not need intellectual reasonings to convince me that I live. All the learned reasons that philosophy or science can adduce are powerless against my simple consciousness of life. Infidelity may array its disproofs of the historic Christ ; it may demonstrate that He is merely one of the world's great prophets, one of the world's good men. It cannot touch the personal certainty of even the most ignorant. Through his entire moral being he feels that Christ has quickened whatever religious life there is in him, and that day by day he nurtures and inspires it. You can-

not touch a consciousness such as this by metaphysical arguments. The proof of life is living ; it may not be proof to others ; to him it is proof indubitable. Even to those who see its marvellous transformations, the individual life becomes a demonstration. Its unexpected righteousness, purity, and moral strength, its devoutness, unselfishness, and godliness, where before only sin and moral weakness were seen, are a moral miracle. No demonstration of the truth and moral power of Christianity equals the conversion to piety and holiness of a sinful man. Hence we rightly put Paul's own conversion amongst the proofs of Christianity.

Still the certainty of individual salvation in Christ comes solely out of the personal consciousness of Christian life. Hence religious certainty grows. The certainty of an old saintly man like Paul—the certainty which is produced by a long Christian experience that rests upon what Christ has been, in the manifold necessities of a strenuous life, in its arduous duties, fierce temptations, sore conflicts, depressions, and sorrows—becomes an absolute feeling, as indubitable as life itself.

It is the natural result of cumulative evidence. An old man's certainty is rooted like an oak ; it is the growth of his entire history. He could as soon doubt that he is a living man as doubt his religious life in Christ. Not only has Christ touched his spiritual nature, he has distinctly entered it, gradually pervaded it, wholly possessed it. He is "a man in Christ." Christ is in him, his "hope of glory."

We might, in justification of Paul's certainty, adduce his entire Christian history—the abounding indications of what, in its successive stages and diversified experiences during more than thirty years, Christ had been to him. In his letter to the Philippians, written a

couple of years before his death, he himself describes, in a detailed and vivid way, how entirely he had entrusted to Christ the interests of his soul—its teaching, its inspiration, its nurture, its keeping.

This, then, is the responsibility of a man—the keeping, the guarding of his soul, the maintenance in his heart and life of religious life and goodness. What a great and solemn entrustment it is! God gives my soul, with all its vital qualities and responsibilities, into my own keeping. Made in God's image, his own vital breath, with power to will and love, to do right and wrong, to revolt from its Maker, and to defy Him, it is my solemn responsibility of life to keep my soul devout and pure, to preserve undefaced the image in which I was created. How terribly men have failed in keeping their soul! how they have abused and perverted its great endowments! In the very exercise of its Godlike prerogatives they have arrayed their will against God's will, chosen wrongly, become rebellious children. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is the sad and sorrowful consciousness of every living man.

Again let Paul bear witness. In his letter to the Romans he tells us how he, a religious Jew, endeavoured to keep his own soul—"I was alive apart from the law once"—and how, when mere outward law-keeping did not satisfy his religious consciousness, and he strove to add inward spiritual obedience to outward conformity, he found the law too exacting for him. "When the commandment came"—when he came to understand the far-reaching spirituality of divine requirement—his fancied righteousness died within him; "sin revived and I died." And this wrought in him an utter, helpless misery, so that he felt like a man to

whom a dead corpse is bound. Plato describes the feeling as being pulled in opposite ways by horses. Then, in his helplessness and agony he found Christ ; and was instantly filled with the power of a new life. "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death ?" "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ created within him a new power of life. Thus he committed his soul to Christ's keeping. He looked to Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, for his new life of righteousness, for every inspiration, and strength, and hope, and comfort of his religious life. Christ became to him "all and in all." His only desire was to be "found in Christ."

And the marvellous life that followed was the attestation of this happy change in his consecration and suffering, his weakness and strength, his hope and fear, his sorrow and joy—through all its vicissitudes Christ was his life. Never had man a larger experience of what, to a human life, Christ can be. Never was more absolute and perfect trust in Christ reposed. And the result was this exulting feeling of perfect satisfaction and rest. Because Christ had been to him all this, Christ would, to the end, be all that He needed. He would "guard that which was committed to Him against that day"—the day when the probation of life should end, and all moral issues should be determined.

Martyrdom awaited him. Whatever its endurance, Christ was able to keep him ; and his patient faithfulness in the past was an assurance that He would keep him still. For the weakest and most perilous days of a Christian life are the days of its first experiences, when perhaps its enthusiasm is greatest, and its wisdom and strength least. A man who has been kept through these, until knowledge has increased, and experience has wrought

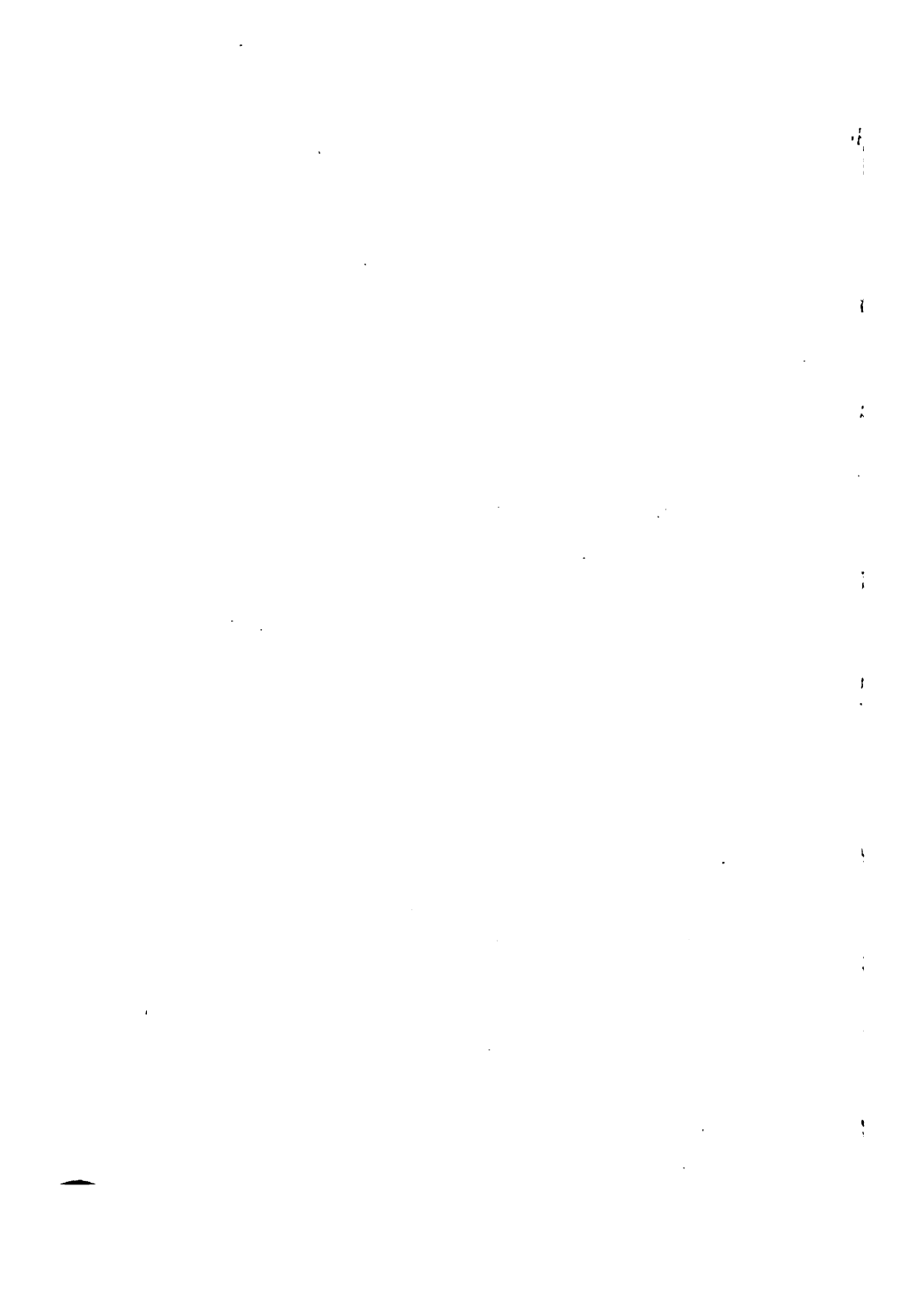
wisdom; until principles have been tested and developed, and habit has been confirmed; until affections have been purified, and sympathies have been perfected; until character has been built up, and love has entirely possessed him, has the strongest reasons for certainty. He who has "taught him from his youth will not leave him when he is old and grey-headed." "He who has begun a good work in him will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "He who knows His sheep and who is known of them; so that they shall never perish, for no man is able to pluck them out of His hand."

My friends, these certainties of Christian faith and hope are momentous powers in our religious life; we need them for our moral strength, and for our religious comfort. There are times when only Christian beliefs can minister to us—times of weakness, sorrow, and desolation, times of sickness and of old age, when our most assured worldly possessions fall from our relaxing grasp, when "heart and flesh fail;" times, again, of questioning and darkness, when we are baffled by the mystery of life; times when the course and experience of life are hard and appalling. Only the teaching of Christ can give us light, only experience of Christ can give us assurance, only trust in Christ can be our stay. When the battle with evil waxes sore we need faith as a shield. When the tempest swells to fierceness we need hope as an anchor. When all other help and strength fail, the great thought that we are in His hand, and that He is able to "guard that which we have committed to Him," is a wonderful strength and stay. "Heart and flesh fail: He is the strength of our heart and our portion for ever."

No other belief can assure us; no other trust can keep us steadfast. Trust in Christ suffices for every

stress. Whatever the desolation, even in the anguish and desolation of death, this gives us calm strength and rejoicing. Even as we fall we triumph ; our last breath is a shout of victory.

Only experience of Christ can produce this certainty. Your life in Christ day by day generates the measure of your dying confidence, the strength of your trust. If your realization of Christ be meagre, your assurance will have a corresponding feebleness. But if your assurance of Christ be large, and continued through long years of life, so that you commune with Him more and more closely, trust Him more and more fully, realize more and more of His sufficiency—then your faith will “grow exceedingly.” It will be fed by large experience, and informed by diversified succour ; so that, when working and struggling days are done, and days of feebleness and waiting come, your confidence will take large forms, your avowals will find large expression. “I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed to Him against that day.”



CHRIST' AND HUMAN SORROW.

"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up : and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor ; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."—*LUKE* iv. 16-22.

IF this passage were not so laden with intrinsic meanings, the picturesqueness of the circumstances might tempt us to linger. It is one of the most dramatic scenes in our Lord's history. For nearly thirty years, and up to this time, He has lived in the little town of Nazareth, known only as a carpenter's son, and Himself probably supporting His widowed mother by His daily toil at the same handicraft.

When the consciousness of His Messiahship came to Him we do not know ; we speak only of the simple incident.

What is the mystic inspiration that sometimes comes to men, and that makes the old familiar life no longer possible—the sudden breaking in of light from Heaven, the mystic swelling of a spiritual tide that carries us on its wave far beyond the customary level of excitement

and purpose, that makes a young man leave his home, a young maiden her father's house for a new departure, a new aim in life? In a somewhat late development, the consciousness of His divine character and mission had come to Jesus of Nazareth. The Evangelists call it a "being led of the Spirit." Can we give a better designation to the mystic impulses that often and suddenly determine a man's calling? He himself cannot explain them; he obeys a resistless inspiration, feels a mysterious intensity, and becomes poet or prophet. Ordinarily, it is what we call genius asserting its vocation. Christ is "filled with the Spirit," and goes forth from Nazareth the conscious Messiah of God.

He returns transformed, the same and yet not the same. He has in the wilderness meditated His great Messianic work. He has been tested by temptation; tempted of the devil, whether He will seek His ends by true ways or false ones; whether He will not forego His great religious mission, and substitute a temporal kingdom for a spiritual one. He returns to Nazareth, the tested, the consecrated Messiah.

On the Sabbath He went to the familiar synagogue, "as His custom was." Yes! we may do accustomed things, but we who do them are changed. The quiet synagogue service could never again be to Jesus what for more than a quarter of a century it had been. He could no more go quietly through the conventional rites and readings. He Himself must now take part; this Jewish custom permitted. He unrolls the parchment of the prophet Isaiah, and reads from the sixty-first chapter; He rolls it up again and returns it to the minister. There was a mysterious fascination about Him; "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him," not merely because of His

act—that was too familiar to cause astonishment—but because of the meaning in His face. Did not the burden of His great mission charge it with expression? Human souls do so look through human countenances: Christ's often did. Soldiers "fell down before Him as dead men." "He turned and looked upon them, and no man dared ask Him any more questions." He was transfigured before them more than once. What was the strange lustre, the overcharged meaning in the face of their familiar fellow-townsmen? "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." How excitement would give place to consternation, that again to indignation, or ridicule, as they realised His meaning! "Is not this Joseph's son?" The young carpenter, who had built or repaired their houses, claiming to be the Messiah concerning whom Isaiah had prophesied! And although at first "they all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," yet, by-and-by, as His discourse proceeded, they were all filled with wrath at His presumptuous claim; and "they rose up and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong."

But, as I said, the great meanings of His words are too important to permit us to linger over these wondrously dramatic and exciting incidents. They occurred nearly two thousand years ago. Had the congregation in that synagogue been endowed with prophecy, could they have foreseen what we see to-day—the Christ and His words ruling, emancipating, and blessing the nations of the earth; or could they, without disturbing passion, have simply realised the great meaning of His words, what a new and startling teaching, what a miracle of grace and love it would have seemed to them; what a

contrast to the old stern legal Judaism ; what a contrast to the hard ritual Pharisaism to which they were accustomed ! It was a new revelation of benevolence that was veritably divine. The very idea of such a Gospel to the poor was new to these Jews ; the human sentiment that could make it seem glorious had to be created by itself.

If it be a note of far-reaching wisdom to include in its provisions all sorts and conditions of men, the religion of Jesus Christ may claim this universal fitness. The preacher of Christianity has this great advantage, that no conceivable diversity of human character, or circumstance, or interest, can present itself but his is the most penetrating and remedial word that can be spoken to it. Philosophy may expound its principles, morality may enjoin its duties, political economy or legislation may provide its expedients, but there is no philosophy so profound, no ethical duty so lofty, no social remedy so effective as that which the religion of Jesus Christ speaks. It is never incongruous, for it deals with the entire nature and experience of man, from the spiritual life of his soul to the minutest courtesy of his social life ; nothing is foreign to it that is human. It is not impotent advice, for it deals with the most radical principles and the strongest motives of human action. It is not a mere legislative compulsion, for it enlists on its behalf the living sympathies and yearnings of a man's innermost heart. Its pure spirituality of conception, its broad catholicity of human life, its vital feeling of obligation both to God and to man, bring every human thing within its range, and subordinate them to its power.

Whatever the origin of Christianity, whoever devised it, it is, to say the least, the most wonderful of all

systems of human economy. It is everywhere most profoundly true to human nature and adequate to human necessity. Can less be said of it than this—that only He who made man and overrules all his experiences could have devised for him a teaching so sagacious, so true, and so good?

If, even as a provision for the social needs of man, Christianity be not a supernatural revelation from God, its miracle is only the greater. If from God, I can account for it; if of mere human evolution or genius, it is unique in human history, and absolutely inscrutable.

Christianity, then, has things to say about human life, its social as well as its spiritual conditions. Jesus Christ had much to teach concerning human relations and duties. All that He had to say about the religious feelings, the spiritual experiences of men, was closely connected with their practical human life; their piety towards God was to express itself in religious action towards men. If a man did not love his brother whom he had seen, he could have no true love to God whom he had not seen. By their fruits they were to be known. The personal ministry of Christ was therefore very largely a ministry to the physical poverty and sickness and misery of men. In the records of the Evangelists this has as much prominence as His spiritual teaching concerning the Father; indeed, His teaching concerning the Father has constant applications to the condition of the poor and needy. The loftiest spiritual things are connected in a divine way with the lowliest social duties and the tenderest human sympathies.

It is as characteristic as it is beautiful that the note with which He opens His ministry in the synagogue of

Nazareth is His mission to the poor. And it is equally significant that Isaiah should have selected such qualities in predicting Him as the Messiah ; this pitiful and helping compassion was to be His great characteristic.

The citation from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth is the keynote of all true Christian ministry. The teaching of Christianity that is not a pitiful ministry to the poor is perverted and false. Christ comes solely to minister to human misery, and to alleviate whatever is the cause of it. He might have taken a grand kingly passage and proclaimed His own Messianic greatness. An ordinary carpenter's son, standing up in his own village church, would certainly have done so. But then, in Christ, it would have been a false note, altogether incongruous with His mission. The divine stamp upon it is His entire forgetfulness of self, His intense absorption in His ministry ; as if the self existed only for the service. It is not so much that He takes a text of pitiful sympathy, that He proclaims a mission of helpfulness ; it is His necessary word, the outbreak of the feeling and purpose that filled Him. We cannot even imagine a different utterance.

It was startling enough, no doubt, to His hearers : they had not heard such words from their religious teachers ; the religious teaching of the Pharisees had been very different in its tone ; their own hearts had not been trained and inspired to the enthusiasm for humanity that filled His. They had therefore no interpreting sympathies. Many of us, even, the disciples of two thousand Christian years, lack these. Christian philanthropy is of slow growth. In each individual heart it has to struggle against innate selfishness. Few individual men ever attain to great Christian philanthropy. We look on the yearning intensity and self-

sacrifice of Christ's benevolence with more of ignorant wonder and worship than of intelligent imitative sympathy. A man inspired with anything like the unresting, self-sacrificing philanthropy of Christ, would be a moral miracle amongst us—worshipped as a saint, or contemptuously pitied as a fanatic.

The public sentiment of human pity and help is, I say, of slow growth. We can trace its development through past generations. We wonder at the long continuance of social wrongs through the Early and Middle Ages. It is almost incredible that slavery in Christian Britain and America has existed in our own day; and that it was justified from Christian pulpits, and practised by saintly Christian men. How Quixotic the philanthropy of John Howard, of William Wilberforce, of Thomas Clarkson, of Elizabeth Fry appeared! How missions to the heathen were withstood, even by clerical essayists in leading reviews, and regarded with incredulity by even the most pious. How popular education was denounced, even in bishops' charges! How Romilly's repeal of penal laws that punished petty theft by hanging was resisted in the House of Lords by the bishops! How ragged-schools were ridiculed! How good people were scandalised at midnight meetings, and theatre preachings!

The heart that was in Christ is necessarily most inscrutable to human selfishness; the benevolences that are most Christ-like are necessarily the most startling. The very idea of such a ministry had to be created in our Lord's time. Men were without the sentiment that could appreciate its glory. It was a divine revelation of a new feeling and ideal of life; and we are very far from realising it yet. Nay, have we not still a lurking feeling that as Christ inculcated it, it is somewhat

fanatical, and that He was somewhat to be pitied because He did not appreciate more fully the comfort and pleasantness of our luxurious homes, our sumptuous living, and our selfish absorption? This only shows how terrible the deadening process of self-indulgence is. It destroys all power of pity, all impulse of help. Think of the selfish life of the best of us, in contrast with the self-sacrifice of His benevolence! In the worst of us there are no grounds for a comparison. Which, however, is the true, the divine conception of human life? To what is our life of ostentatious luxury, or of quiet, more refined, but equally intense selfishness, moulding and attempering us? What do we become in the lapse of years?

But even in that hard selfish time, this declaration of a ministry of pity was the directest way to human hearts. Men can feel beyond their power of understanding. There were then, as now, multitudes of the sorrowful and broken-hearted; and His words found them in their deepest place of need. If this really were the note of the Messiah—to “comfort all who mourn, to bind up the broken-hearted”—they had no need so great, no ministry would be more welcomed.

It was the keynote to all the music of his life. He had become a poor man that He might attain a qualifying sympathy so to minister to the poor. He was the exemplification of the necessity to what He ministered. It was His “grace” that “though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor.” I need not cite His teachings and doings for illustrations of this. Never was life so imbued with a spirit, so dominated by an impulse, so consecrated to an end. It was “the work that was given Him to do”; and He did it, not as a task, but as an enthusiasm, which mere sense of duty can never

understand. No tone of His life is so predominant, no attitude of it so constant, as that of philanthropy. Wherever He went people flocked around Him, bringing their sick, as to an angel of healing. What a record it is! "Now when the sun was setting all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them."

John sends to ask His credentials: "Go tell John the things that ye have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached to them." The Nazareth text—Isaiah's prophecy—has been translated into history. His miracles were anything but mere credentials; their impulse was chiefly benevolent pity, their character was always benevolent help. His enthusiasm for humanity inspired all that He did and said, gave its reference to every teaching, its aim to every doing. It pervades alike the Sermon on the Mount and the miracle of the wilderness, the parable of the Good Samaritan and the raising of Lazarus. Scarcely can finger be laid upon word or doing that is not seeking to help and bless. Everywhere the poor and the sick are His clients and witnesses; all day long they are "coming and going, so that He had not leisure so much as to eat." He was the Christus Consolator of Palestine, as since of the world. "Who like Him makes blest?" His very name is a benediction; the popular designation of Christianity is "Gospel." There is no spell like His for the comfort of those who mourn and are troubled. "He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall."

These are the divine notes of the Christ ; palpable enough when indicated, but so transcendent in moral grace that they must be of God. It seems obvious enough ; it does not need, we are told, a supernatural revelation to teach such a sentiment as this. It is not like a mystery of the divine nature or purpose. All men have the sentiment of benevolence, and could easily grow up to the pity and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Could they ? Are not grand moral idea, grand moral life, precisely the things which most of all need an incarnate Christ ? Intellectual discovery is nothing compared with perfect goodness ; there is nothing that men find so impossible. They make light over it as a dream, they ridicule it as a fanaticism. Their selfishness makes them incredulous ; they neither believe nor strive. Almost everything else might have dispensed with supernatural revelation. A pitying love like that of Jesus Christ could not have been realized without it, or even conceived. Again, I say, it is a mark of the divine, that the characteristic mission of Jesus Christ should have been, not a theological teaching, but a ministry of moral goodness and self-sacrificing love.

It is this characteristic of Christianity that gives it its place and power in human life. Goodness and love are their own credentials. Jesus Christ does not begin with theological expositions and arguments ; He speaks words such as he spake in the synagogue of Nazareth, and men's hearts open to Him as flowers to the sun. All men can see goodness and feel loving sympathy ; Jesus Christ, therefore, cannot be displaced in social life. Arguments cannot discredit Him, so long as He brings a love and a pity so infinitely transcending all others.

Christianity thus moves in the stream of our social tendency; we are becoming more humane and brotherly and helpful, benevolences are multiplying, tender-heartedness is growing; hard selfishness, oppressive exactions, brutal vice, wicked wars, are more and more denounced. How human sympathies, how social benevolences have grown and multiplied during the last half-century! We live in another world; thanks, we say, to Christianity, the mother of all social philanthropy. At any rate, this is the tendency; and Christianity holds so strong a place because it is at the head of this tendency. The social philosophy of the world has not yet overtaken Christian ideas; the practical philanthropy of the world does not yet vie with Christian agencies and self-sacrifices. The radical question between Christianity and schemes of socialism and humanitarianism is not one of abstract ideas, metaphysical doctrines, miraculous claims, or even of methods. It is one of practical human goodness, holiness of character, brotherhood of feeling, unselfishness of service, self-sacrifice in helping. Eliminate from our social benevolence all that Christianity directly inspires, from our social advance all that Christianity has directly achieved; what would you have left?

Our social life is still filled with the poor and the suffering; they are and ever have been the world's majority. Into the manifold causes of this I cannot here enter; they are complex and deep-seated.

Suffering is involved in the very conditions of human life—climate, labour, frailty, social conditions and relations, competition, bad government, sanitary ignorance or negligence, wars between nations, pestilence and famine, the greed and oppression of selfishness in a thousand forms. It is a strenuous life, an evil world;

and we have to do with it as it is. We may blame the Creator for so ordaining it; we may protest against evil men who so make it—that will not help us: we are in it and have to deal with it. Jesus Christ had. He did not spend His energies in general protests, in devising social economies. He began with the world as it was, and practically tried to counteract its evils.

In ourselves, as individual men, there are causes of evil—our human ignorance, our intellectual inferiority, our practical inaptitude. Others surpass us in intelligence and ability, and their selfishness takes advantage of us; they push us back, doom us to dependence, and will do so until selfishness is purged out of men's hearts. Nay, that would not rectify the disparity, only the misuse of it. The large-thoughted man, the philosopher, the organizer, the inventor, must and ought to have the advantage over the ignorant and half-imbecile labourer; a man who can do only physical work with his hands cannot equal the man of sagacious and ruling mind. All attempts to reduce them to an equality are vain, and if successful, would be disastrous.

A man who, in the competition of life, is contented in his half-brute ignorance, dooms himself to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water.

And then there is the working of vicious passions—the indolence of the lazy, the recklessness or waste of the unthrifty, the social ruin of the drunken and the dissolute. Who shall estimate the poverty and misery that are caused by these? The most equitable and perfect social arrangements, the most sagacious and philanthropic legislation, could not even touch the main causes of poverty and suffering. Something to alleviate circumstance may be done; something to prevent oppression; something to prohibit conditions of life that

unprincipled greed compels ; but the inherent vital conditions are in the individual man himself, and no alteration of mere circumstance can touch these. Make all men equal in circumstances to-morrow morning, the disparity and dislocation would be far advanced before evening. What is the method of Jesus Christ ?

First, He comes with the simple outpouring of His heart of pity. He looks simply upon human need and sorrow, and He has compassion upon it. He does not begin by definitions and discriminations ; He pities the sinful—those whose miseries are self-caused—just as He does the unfortunate. He is not afraid of being misunderstood ; he can lift up the woman who is a sinner. His pity is for “the broken-hearted,” whatever the cause of their anguish ; for “the captives,” whatever ignorance or sin has bound fetters upon their manhood ; for “the blind,” whatever has darkened their moral eyesight. He comes to heal all who need healing, to teach all who need teaching, to liberate all who need freedom. He does not make distinctions between physical misery and moral misery. It is *misery*, and He yearns to alleviate it. The simple feeling is a gospel—the feeling that does not stop to moralise or to preach, but that simply pours out its heart of pity.

He does not speak loftily or daintily ; His pity is not self-complacent, nor patronising. He forgets Himself as He goes down into the crowd and Aceldama of human life ; with gentle words and earnest heart and helping hand, He seeks to comfort and save. It is the misery that selfishness trades in, that sentimental benevolence turns away from, because its nerves are too sensitive, that the priest and the Levite “pass by on the other side.” He pleads no refinement of feeling, no

repugnance of sentiment, no nervous sensibility. He stands face to face with both sorrow and sin. It is not for the physician to shrink from disease; He "receives sinners and eats with them."

It is easy enough to recognise this benevolence of Christ as a general characteristic; we do not often realise it in these personal practical conditions of it. It does not often affect the selfish comfort of our own refined and luxurious lives. How carefully we "pass by on the other side!" The slums of London are so terrible we are careful never to look upon their misery; nay, we can scarcely bear to hear about them; we prefer not to know. We walk through miles of poverty-inhabited districts, and, if they encroach too near, we move to a more respectable neighbourhood, and think no more about them—we, the self-complacent disciples of this pitiful helping Christ!

He helps by a purely personal ministry; by physical food and healing, by holy moral teaching and appeal, by religious influence. He has not a word to say in disparagement of property, of wealth, of personal enjoyment. He does not take the riches of the wealthy and give them to the poor. He does not deprive any man of his possessions, or rebuke him for them. He condemns nothing but selfishness and hard-heartedness. "The rich and the poor meet together;" He demands only brotherly sympathy and help—that the "strong shall bear the infirmities of the weak," that "he who seeth his brother have need" shall minister to him.

No communism ever propounded to men is so radical as Christian communism. It redresses the inequalities of life, it ministers to the sorrows of life, not by parliamentary or social adjustments of property; it stands upon the higher and far more cogent ground of moral

sympathy, obligation, and benevolence, the inspirations of human pity, of brotherhood, of charity, of self-sacrifice. The rich man keeps his wealth, but he uses it for blessing the needy. God does not take it from him, but He inspires him to give it. He makes such use of it as secures even to himself the highest blessedness that it can minister. How blessed the Christ was in so ministering! Was any human joy equal to His, any consciousness so lofty? Is any pleasure of soul so great as "the blessings of those ready to perish"?

Were He to come on earth again, He would not, I think, be found the guest of kings, a worshipper in our cathedrals or sumptuous churches. Going in quest of Him, we should direct our feet to the darkest places of our great cities, their Spitalfields or St. Giles, their hospitals or prisons. Opening some costermonger's door, we should find Him working some miracle of beneficence there, putting bread upon some empty table, bending pitifully over some starving child, restoring health to some palsied man, or giving back her only son to a widow. Where the most misery was, He would, I think, be found.

I might remark, how many He would save from being poor, through their own moral redemption, would they but yield their hearts to Him. But this is not my special urgency just now; only we may never forget His great radical and moral method of remedying human evil. Others touch the mere circumstance of the man; Christ changes his very heart and life.

How like a romance, a Utopia, all this seems to many of us!—which only shows how far short of Christ's benevolence we fall. Think what He was, what He sacrificed, what He ministered; how He was jarred and pained by

human misery and sin ; think of what, throughout its history, Christianity has been—the minister, the emancipator, and protector of the poor ; and then ask if our own modern London lives are so exempt in their daintiness and occupation, that we may complacently conclude that we can have no part or praise in the great ministry which outcast London beseeches with a great and bitter cry !

THE COMFORTER.

THE COMFORTER.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth ; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him to you.”—JOHN xvi. 7.

ONE does not wonder that our Lord should feel it needful, for the second time, to assure His bewildered and astounded disciples that He is telling them the simple truth. He had told them of the many mansions of the Father's house, that He might still the trouble of their hearts at His departure. “If it were not so I would have told you.” They would feel the force of His appeal to what they knew of His veracity, exactness, and love. And now again : “I tell you the truth. Notwithstanding the sorrow with which My going away has filled your hearts, it is better for you that I should go”—an assertion more difficult to believe than even that about the many mansions.

It was that parting hour of mysterious thoughts, of agonized affections, which is sometimes experienced when we are sure that death stands at the door and waits ; when but a few minutes are given for parting words and loving reciprocations. Only, their Master was in the fulness of life and health. But for this mysterious assurance they could not have thought of His death. He reiterated it in their incredulous ears, and poured out mysterious and lofty consolations—greater thoughts, more spiritual sanctities, more loving sympathies than

had ever fallen from His lips before. They were awed and perplexed as well as sorrowful.

Then, His departure was the disappointment of their greatest hopes. Upon their Jewish standing-ground all their hopes of His Messianic kingdom were frustrated—they “trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel ;” and now He tells them that instead of sitting upon the throne of his father David, He is about to die. Not only were they losing more than affection ever lost before, but the fabric of their most cherished hopes lay in ruins at their feet. All the hopes and purposes of their discipleship had melted away like the mirage of the desert. What had been the purpose of His mission? What had He meant by His teaching? Who and what was He?

I think that they scarcely realized then the peculiar perils and sorrows that would come upon themselves; although their Master had forewarned them they would be excluded from Jewish religious life, and treated as enemies of God and goodness. Yea, “whosoever killed them would think that he did God service.” “The disciple would not be above his Lord:” “they hated Me before they hated you.”

Scarcely would they think of this: their absorbing thought would be the destruction of their great Messianic hope, in the death of their Master. And it seems to have produced in them a stupor of feeling almost approaching to paralysis. “Does none of you even ask Me whither I go? Hath sorrow so entirely filled your heart because I have spoken these things? Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. Whatever sorrow my going away may cause you, it will be to you a transcendent blessing. If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you; and when He

is come He will work mightily in men, convincing them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. You cannot understand now the things that I have to say to you concerning this great mission of the Holy Spirit. I can only assure you of its truth and greatness and blessing. It will be to you more than even My personal presence with you."

This great saying raises momentous questions concerning the Trinity of the divine Being—the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I cannot here enter upon them, nor, if I could, would it be possible to say much. The mysteries even of our own being are inscrutable—the relations of body, soul, and spirit. All life is inscrutable. How much more the being of the infinite God! "Canst thou by searching find out God?" We can know about the divine Being only the facts that God Himself declares to us. All that I know is, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are declared to constitute, in distinct recognitions, the one supreme Deity. About their relations, the mode of the divine existence, we know absolutely nothing.

We are further told, historically, of certain divine manifestations or doings. The spiritual and distinctive ministry of the Holy Spirit follows the personal and Messianic ministry of the Christ. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are represented as conditioned upon the mediatorial work of the Christ. The Father purposes human redemption; the Son, by His atoning work, enables the righteous forgiveness of sin; and the Holy Spirit quickens spiritual life in forgiven men. The dispensation of the Father is followed by the dispensation of the Son; the dispensation of the Son by the dispensation of the Spirit. This is the way in which the divine economy of salvation is put. Of course, the atonement

of Christ had practically availed for the salvation of men from the day of man's sin ; and the Holy Spirit had wrought in men's hearts ; and holy men, like Enoch and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and holy men even in heathen nations, had become such through the quickening life of the Holy Spirit. The death of Christ as the world's Redeemer looked backwards as well as forwards. It was the general ground or basis of God's dealings with the sinful world. Abraham "saw Christ's day," and was justified by his faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

It is only a dispensational distinction that the Bible presents to us, God revealing himself to men in this gradual and progressive way ; but in every age the relations to men of Father, Son, and Spirit have been the same, only presented to us in different aspects—the merciful Father, the redeeming Son, the renewing Spirit. This much it was imperative to say, that we may understand Christ's meaning.

The incarnation of Christ was a fresh revelation of the holiness and love of the Father ; it was the accomplishment in "the fulness of time" of the great atonement ; it was the manifestation of the Son. The manifestation of the Spirit was to follow. The divine presence, and teaching, and redeeming death of the Son were, so to speak, outside the man. Hence but little spiritual result followed Christ's personal ministry. He made but few disciples ; "the Spirit was not yet given." "Though He had done so many mighty works amongst them, yet did they not believe on Him."

He promised, therefore, a still greater ministry than His own—a life-giving Power, who should quicken religious feeling within them, who should be, not an outward teacher, but an indwelling life-giver and sanctifier ;

and who should do His mighty spiritual work by "taking the things of Christ and showing them to us." Henceforth the Spirit would work in the hearts of men, not through the partial and imperfect truths of the old Jewish dispensation, but through the new and transcendent truths of Christ's incarnation and atonement. The Spirit, so to speak, has henceforth greater truths to work with. Hence His greater power over human hearts; hence the mighty spiritual effects produced by Christian teachings, from the Day of Pentecost until now. Men are quickened and sanctified by the amazing facts, by the potent truths, of Christ's incarnation and death.

This, I think, is the teaching of the Bible concerning the dispensation and work of the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost was simply the special manifestation, the formal inauguration of the dispensation of the Spirit. Henceforth, men were to be taught by purely spiritual ideas, and were to be made holy by purely spiritual forces. Miracles and prophesyings were to cease; the personal teaching and example of Christ were withdrawn; the atoning death was accomplished; and Christ ascended to heaven. The revelation of God's truth and love was completed; and henceforth only spiritual forces were to work in the hearts of men.

This, I think, is what Christ meant by this startling assertion. And it is a wonderful and beautiful harmony—the proper sequence of the divine economy. First, the Father reveals Himself as the righteous God, against whom we have sinned. Then, the Son reveals Himself as making atonement for sin. Then, the Holy Spirit reveals Himself as the life-giver and sanctifier in the hearts of men. If it be only a religious imagination, it is a very wonderful one—wonderful in its vastness, in its sublimity, in its harmony with both

righteousness in God and the processes of religious life in men. That the Bible writers should have been capable of such a vast and profound philosophy of religious life, or should have invented such a religious romance, is simply incredible.

I think that we may thus understand what Christ meant, and see its wonderful truth. Life wrought in a human soul is more than truth presented to it, even though Christ Himself presents it.

"It is expedient for you that I go away." No word that He could have spoken could so have magnified the gift of the Spirit, the grace and power of purely spiritual truth and influence.

It is difficult to think of any privilege greater than the personal presence and fellowship of Jesus Christ. No wonder that it needed the unwonted asseveration of their divine Lord to convince the incredulous hearts of the disciples that there would be a greater. However others might have regarded Him, cast Him out, sought to stone Him, crucified Him, these poor disciples had learned to love and worship Him. They had found His bosom a pillow for their cares, His heart a sanctuary for their affections. He had taught them the divinest truths; He had filled them with spiritual strength. His life had been to them a luminous glory, a pattern for their piety, a sure ground for their faith. He had wrought miracles for their need; He had knelt for them in prayer. He had inspired them with human love and brotherhood. He was to them both earthly friend and heavenly guide. They had seen Him tempted of the devil, refusing earthly glory. He had been transfigured before them, and they had worshipped Him as the Son of God;—they "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." They had seen His works of

power and blessing, His life of sanctity and love. "Blessed were their eyes, for kings and priests and righteous men had desired to see what they saw." And, through all, they had found Him the most thoughtful, tender, patient friend. Had He not loved John, and taught Peter, and gratefully said of them all, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation"? Was ever such tenderness poured forth from so full a heart, as on this night when He was betrayed; were ever such words uttered by human lips? It is the Holy of Holies of the temple of His teaching. No wonder that sorrow should fill their hearts. Wonderful must the blessing be that could overpass the presence of their Lord. What is it?

Suppose that He had remained on earth; or, according to the wild and sensuous imagination of the millenarian, that He will personally return and reign upon the earth, would His personal presence be a religious privilege equal to the indwelling of the Spirit of life? Sometimes we think that if we could but see Jesus with our bodily eyes, and listen to Him as the disciples did, we should break away from sin and be holier men; we should know with a certainty, and love, and an enthusiasm that we do not experience now. His personal influence would act upon us like a spell, and change the whole character of our lives; we could tell Him all we feel, and submit ourselves to His guidance; we should never know another sceptical thought, or yield to another sinful feeling. We find faith difficult; He gives us no sign from Heaven. He throws us upon moral evidence and reasonings. Instead of welcoming the spiritual Comforter whom He sends, we are ready to say, "Abide with us, Lord, and we shall be comforted; abide with us, and we shall be obedient and

holy." Indifference and sin would be impossible. The covetous man thinks that he would relax his eager grasp of gold did he but hear Christ say, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" the sensual man, that he would leave his carnal pursuits did he but hear Christ talk about the house of many mansions; the ambitious man, that his pride would be rebuked could he but see Christ "set a little child in the midst;" the distrustful man, that he could no longer fear did he but hear Christ preach about the lilies; the sceptic, that he would believe if he saw the print of the nails. Anything rather than rest in the actual evidence of historic and moral proof; any material thing rather than a spiritual presence! It is the spirit of Martha—"Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died." How few of those who did see Him believed in Him! Even the disciples were slow of heart to believe. So it would be were Christ now present on earth. The dispositions that reject Him now would reject Him then. He who is not convinced by the spiritual truth and life and power of Christianity, would not believe though he saw Christ rise from the dead. Something in these wild fancies there may be, but the proof of conscious life and holiness is the strongest of all proofs. No evidence is so lofty and strong as moral evidence. Now, think of it; were Christ now on earth His continued life would be a physical miracle. He could not be to us what He was to the disciples. Were Christ on earth He would be subject to physical limitations of place and action. He would be only in one spot, Jerusalem or elsewhere. How few of the sons of men would see Him! The entire organization of social life would be dislocated in pilgrimages to behold Him; and, after all, He would be only

THE COMFORTER.

a being external to us,—seen by us once in a lifetime. It is a conception pitifully, weakly sensuous. Anything to get rid of the culture and responsibility of lofty spiritual thought and life! Spirituality is not the offspring of the sensuous.

Christ affirms a higher order of spiritual life, which men may everywhere and always realize. He, the divine Lord, ascended up on high, entered into His glory, become head over all things to His Church, “is with us always, even to the end of the world;” “in the midst of us wherever two or three are gathered together in His name.” And His Spirit is working upon the noblest faculties of man—upon his highest intelligence, his holiest feelings, his most benevolent impulses. It is the highest condition of spiritual life; it is a teaching full of great lessons.

Thus, to generalize it, how often the greatest trial is the necessary condition of the greatest blessing—death in order to life; the cross in order to the resurrection! Had not Christ gone away, how carnal the disciples’ conceptions of His religion would have remained; how sensuous their thought, their love, their fellowship! His form, His voice, His touch were their tests. Even Mary, after His resurrection, wanted to touch Him, as Thomas did. His kingdom was personal and local, not spiritual and universal. The person was more than the truth, the life, or the duty.

How would the unity of the Church, the abiding presence of Christ with it, have been realized? How would the spiritual man himself be developed—his reason, his faith, his affections? The child must leave the government of home, the control of parents, to be developed in manhood. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, was very different from Peter in the hall of Caiaphas. All

the disciples were different—fuller of spiritual thought and life and power, because He had gone away. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual."

The practical lesson is, that we cherish everything that pertains to spiritual life—spiritual thoughts, conceptions, feelings—that we do not, by carnal things and thoughts, "grieve the Spirit," even "quench the Spirit." This we may do, not only by lusts and sins, but by negligence and sensuous religiousness; by substituting creeds and rituals and means of grace, for grace itself. Whatever in our worship, in our religious life or habit, substitutes the sensuous for the spiritual—ceremony, ritual ordinances, music, eloquence, intellectual beliefs, for the exercise of spiritual affections, for the heart seeking God, holding spiritual fellowship with God, in prayer, in praise, in the nurture of the soul by truth, in the sanctification of the heart by love—is "grieving the Spirit," hindering His working, hardening the heart. We may "quench the Spirit" by our material tests of spiritual revelation, by formal religious exercises; and by nothing more rapidly. The Pharisee is harder, less susceptible than the publican. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His." The Church is full of unspiritual men, who neither realise the sanctity of His indwelling nor are inspired by His power.

Our seeking and prayer should be for the indwelling and fulness of the divine Spirit. Let a man attain to true and fervent spiritual life, and everything else will be right. He will not need commandments; He will be "a law unto himself." And God's great promise is that He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."—GAL. v. 22, 23.

CONTROVERSY is an essential condition of Christian progress; as, indeed, of all propagation of truth. Christ came "not to send peace on earth, but a sword"; not a sword of territorial conquest, but the flaming "sword of the Spirit," which wars against ignorance and evil passion and prejudice; which arrays truth and conscience and benevolence against error and wrong and selfishness.

Christianity has from the first been aggressive. It has refused all compromise with sin; it has assailed evil in the individual heart, evil in social institutions, evil in the Church itself; and it must continue to do this, so long as any vestige of sin or error remains. The world has never yet seen that peace of perfect holiness and love which is the ideal of Christianity. "My peace give I unto you, not as the world giveth." Christian work hitherto has been to assail evil wherever evil is found; to conquer for Christ one domain after another. Its progress has been marked by battlefields and blackened stakes of martyrs. Its thrones have been the purity and love of the hearts that it has won—"a kingdom not of this world." Hence old controversies have perpetually reappeared. Forms of error and of truth

change with changing generations, but their principles are constant as human nature. The conflict between the spiritual and the sacerdotal, which Paul is here maintaining, is no novelty of our own times, nor of Christianity. In the old Jewish Church it was very fierce, and is typified in the prophet and the priest. In the early Christian Church it began from the very first. Paul had to preach his spiritual gospel "with much contention." It was a conflict not merely with Judaism without the Church, but with Judaism within the Church—the principles and the methods of Judaism claiming a place in Christian religiousness. So that even a man of spiritual life, fidelity, and love, like Peter the Rock, the opener of the kingdom of Christ to both Jews and Gentiles, was carried away with the sentiment; and Paul, the asserter of the pure spirituality of the Gospel, had to "withstand him to the face because he was to be blamed." He speaks in strong denunciation of the "false brethren" whom the Judaizing Christians privily brought in to spy out the liberty which they had in Christ Jesus, and to bring them again into ceremonial bondage. No errors are so difficult to deal with as the errors of good men; no battle is so arduous as contention against wrong methods of doing right things. They are often the holiest and devoutest men of the Church that fall into mistaken ritual; and their goodness seems to sanction their methods. No untruth is so difficult to deal with as that which is half true. An absolute and unqualified error, maintained by pure polemical methods, is easily dealt with; but an element of error in the true heart of a good man is almost invincible. But that which is comparatively harmless in a devout man may be very pernicious to men generally, if it establishes itself as part of a system. We see

illustrations of this in the history of every ritual Church. Men easily substitute elaborate and impressive forms of godliness for its power.

To preserve the spiritual Gospel of Christ from such adulteration of ritual, Paul does not hesitate to "withstand to the face" even a godly and eminent apostle like Peter. It is instructive, that a true man like Peter should be carried away by the dissimulation of the Judaisers; and that a young apostle like Paul should dare all the risks of controversy with him in order to preserve the spiritual purity of the Gospel.

And this has been the conflict of every age since. How the sacerdotal, the sacramentarian, and the ritual dogmas of the Eastern and the Roman Churches have corrupted the simplicity of spiritual life in Christ! And never perhaps has this conflict been more strenuous and portentous than it is now. It may have been more violent and disastrous, but scarcely more subtle and persistent. At the present moment it rends the Episcopal Church of this country into schismatical parties that are radical; and they are on both sides the best men of the Church that maintain the conflict the most vehemently.

Ritual, indeed, has been more or less the cause of schism in almost every Church in Christendom. Even Puritan Churches have had their schismatic superstitions about Baptism and the Lord's Supper—who are the proper recipients of the one, who are the authorised administrators of the other, and what precisely is their distinctive grace. Neither party, perhaps, is wholly free from blame. Both have attached undue importance to mere things, to forms and ceremonies. One has made a conscience of insisting upon the latter; the other has

made a conscience of excluding them unduly. One has been superstitious, the other has been ascetic.

Paul was, I think, abundantly justified in his strenuous contention against the slightest adulteration of spiritual Christianity by sacramentarian or ritual doctrines. Practically, the question was a vital one. What is essential to a true Christian life? What church, what creed, what sacraments? Are any of these essential conditions of spiritual life in Christ? Does the non-observance of any of these remit a man to "God's uncovenanted mercies," or are they only means of expressing and of nurturing the spiritual life? Does baptism by its regenerating power make me a child of God, or is it only declarative? Is the Lord's Supper the condition of a real distinctive presence of Christ, or is its special grace simply the special remembrance of Christ's death? Does the divinely-prescribed organism of a Church determine the spiritual life, or does the spiritual life simply embody itself in the organism? Has Christ determined the ecclesiastical construction, or has He left the Christian life to determine such as may be most expedient for it in various conditions; just as nations and families—both also of divine ordination—are yet left to determine their own forms of rule and of life?

To a certain order of minds, somewhat timid, perhaps, and superficial, such prescriptions of priest and sacrament, ritual and authority, seem indispensable. They are afraid of liberty. The self-sufficiency of the spiritual life fills them with vague apprehensions. Liberty must necessarily produce lawlessness; spiritual methods must degenerate into irreligiousness. So in the government of nations. Men think that imperative law is the essential condition of order. They have no faith

in the self-control of freedom, or in the great principle that liberty is the true condition of order. Lawlessness kept down by force is not order. In religion especially, where a sentiment of reverence for divine things has influence, it is difficult to emancipate men from the traditions of ecclesiastical prerogative, from the superstitions of priesthoods and of sacraments. A certain feeling of sacredness makes them timid.

Paul's battle, therefore, was an arduous one—a battle within the Church, not without it; a battle with devout, half-timid religious feeling, ay, and with strong, heroic men like Peter to lead it. The Judaisers were organized as a propaganda. Wherever Christian preaching went they followed it. They dogged the footsteps of Paul, as spies and opponents. Wherever men were converted by Christian truth this sacramentarian leaven was infused. Men asking "what they must do to be saved" were told that "except they observed the law of Moses they could not be saved." At Antioch, at Corinth, in the semi-barbarous region of Galatia, Paul had to wage this uncompromising war against brethren whom he honoured and loved; and often with a sorely troubled and indignant soul. He loved Peter much, but he loved truth more than he loved Peter.

This Epistle to the Galatians is a passionate invective. Paul's patience had been tried beyond endurance by the schismatical and destructive work of the Judaising emissaries. And, like the lava of a repressed volcano, he pours out the passion of this, the fiercest and most denunciatory of his letters. In this part of his Epistle the question discussed is, How is the freedom of the Christian life, for which he has contended, to be kept from abuse? He does not for a moment hesitate about

its maintenance. Come what may, the spiritual freedom of the Gospel of Christ must not be compromised. What, then, are its true safeguards? What shall keep it from the abuses of lawlessness?

He formulates no precepts, prescribes no methods. He simply trusts to the great principles and impulses of the spiritual life itself. The man whom God has spiritually quickened and sanctified is a law unto himself. Let a man cultivate a spiritual temper of mind and of heart—love, joy, peace, goodness, meekness—it will rule his bearing. It will impel long-suffering, kindness, beneficence; and constrain honesty, gentleness, temperance. If there be danger of licence, do not appeal to ecclesiastical law, to external authority; stir up and cherish the principles and affections of the spiritual life itself. Flesh and spirit are in necessary antagonism; each will express its own nature. Let the law of the spirit be so cultured and cherished as that it shall subjugate the law of the flesh.

It is in this incidental and interesting way that we get this fundamental maxim for the rule of the religious life. Religious life has its seat in the soul of a man. Its discipline, therefore, is the discipline of the soul. Let all carnal tendencies, such as those of the Judaising teaching, be corrected, not by Church authority or ritual, but by a distinct recognition and culture of the spiritual life itself. As with the dishonest man, or the drunken man, prisons and pledges are not radical remedies, only the essential honesty and sobriety of the man's own heart. There is no virtue in being kept from evil by force or by regulations, only in the heart itself spontaneously turning from it. So in religious life, the inner feeling, not the ascetic ritual, is the test of the man.

In this incidental way, too, we get a description of what, in its sentiments and moral forces, the spiritual life is. It is purely vital—constituted, nurtured, perfected by processes of inward life. It cannot be constituted by any outward relation or observance—by church or sacrament, or ritual, or acts of obedience. These may express it, nurture it, develop it—as food and habit develop physical life—but they do not constitute it. It is purely the life and the living force of the inward soul. It is purely individual, and yet common to all spiritual men. Just as with physical life, no two men are alike in the individualities of character, but all alike possess the fundamental qualities of manhood. Life and law, vital growth and external conformity, spirit and letter, intrinsically differ, but both are combined in one actual development. Only, it is the life that determines the organism, not the organism that determines the life.

Both the Judaizer and the Evangelical preacher, both Peter and Paul are men of genuine spiritual life. Men who contend for priesthoods and sacraments and rituals are not therefore destitute of spiritual life; neither are men who rely upon inward processes, indifferent to Church institutions and means of grace.

The Ritualist does not imagine that his sacramental charm will operate without the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Evangelical does not suppose that sacraments are incompatible with spiritual grace. We speak only of characteristic principles and tendencies. The Judaizer and the sacramentarian condition spiritual life and its nurture upon an exclusive Church, an assumed apostolical succession, a priestly grace of the sacraments, in a way which the Evangelical refuses, as inconsistent with the very spiritual genius of the Gospel.

and with the liberty of its disciples. It is Paul, the true apostle, vindicating against Peter, the true apostle, the prerogatives of spiritual life and freedom; which in a thousand ways Sacramentarianism assails. No form of institution may be made essential to it.

Athanasian creeds are imposed, with their metaphysical definitions, "which except a man believe he cannot be saved." Baptism is insisted upon as the condition of spiritual life and of church-membership. The Lord's Supper can be administered only by an ordained priest; and there is realised in it some indefinable presence of Christ, which we realise in no other act of devotion or fellowship. A particular Church claims divinely appointed and therefore exclusive prerogatives; outside of which, a man is left to "uncovenanted mercies." It assumes, therefore, the tremendous right to excommunicate the whole of the Churches of Evangelical Christendom, to disparage the amazing works which the grace of God has wrought by them. Members of Congregational or Presbyterian Churches may perhaps be saved on the ground of invincible ignorance, but they are not included in God's covenant of grace.

These are evidently more than peculiarities to be smiled at. They are prerogatives to be resisted; conditions of Christian discipleship which Christ has not imposed, and which, if made imperative, would depreciate and contract the divine life; "beggary elements" to be peremptorily disallowed, for the sake of precious and fruitful liberties of the spiritual life.

This was Paul's motive for so strenuously resisting everything that tended to adulterate spiritual life, or to compromise its prerogatives. Even the thing that in itself is indifferent, or even good and useful, as a matter

of expediency, becomes pernicious when maintained as imperative and essential. The brazen serpent, so stimulating a memorial, becomes Nehushtan, and is to be destroyed when it excites feelings that tend to idolatry.

Paul, in one set of circumstances, circumcises Timothy; in another condition of things he sternly refuses to circumcise Titus. Luther denounces Sabbath keeping, and ostentatiously violates it, when it had become a ritual superstition; as our Lord had done before him. The Puritans, even with Milton for their laureate, forego in public worship, liturgies, music, and art, when these have perverted or become substitutes for true spiritual worship.

Nay, the best things are always in their perversion the most harmful—the things that have gathered a traditional reverence, a tender sanctity; things that in their proper use are fitting, beautiful, and useful. No wise man will be moved by ignorant reproaches, when, in order to save his city, he razes its suburbs; when, to save his territory, he sacrifices his harvest. Expediency is to be judged by circumstance.

“The fruit of the Spirit,”—that is, the fruit which is produced in human lives by the quickening and nurturing influences of God’s Holy Spirit.

How vital all the representations of Christian religiousness are! Nothing is merely institutional, ritual, or dogmatic. Every process is a process of life—life quickened in the individual man. “Ye must be born again.” We cannot understand it—“whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.” We accept it because God affirms it, because our own conscious experience attests it, and because it is the loftiest and holiest of all religious conceptions. “I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.”

And yet it is in strict accordance with the processes of all life. In the physical domain we sow and water, but God gives the increase. Without His mysterious life-giving the seed would "abide alone"; we should reap no harvest. The philosophy of physical life is every whit as inscrutable as that of spiritual life. The scientist is as much baffled by the mystery of life as the theologian. Life in all its forms is God's secret. It is, however, a strong presumption of the truth of our Lord's teaching, that the processes of spiritual life are perfectly congruous with the processes of all life. The energy of the Holy Spirit in spiritual life is simply that mysterious life-force which in other forms we see working everywhere; that which gives vitality to the seed-corn, and to the physical man; without which the soil and the shower, the food and the various nurture of the animal organism, would be ineffectual. There can be no ministry or fruitfulness in death.

In another form we have here our Lord's own tests of true religiousness. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" "A sower went forth to sow." "I am the vine, ye are the branches." "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit." The final purpose of the tree is to bear fruit. The barren fig-tree is cursed because it is barren. Every other constituent of the tree is there—tissue, sap, branches, foliage; everything in order to fruit. And the quality of the tree is determined by the kind of fruit that it bears—by its fineness, flavour, and plenteousness. Even a true branch does not always bring forth "much fruit."

So that when the religious life produces these surpassing fruits of the Spirit, it fulfils its highest function.

"The man of God is perfect, fruitful unto every good work."

What, then, is the fruit that the apostle demands? It is not an exhaustive list; it is merely a sample of the religious produce of the spiritual man. But you will observe, again, that these are all essentially spiritual. No mere law or ritual of religious life could produce them. They are the temper, the qualities of the man, not his mere doings.

I can, of course, only rapidly characterize them. "Love,"—which, our Lord says, is the fulfilling of all commandments, and which St. Paul enthrones as the queen of all spiritual qualities—love is the pervading temper of a man; that sensibility and kindliness of disposition which indicate and inspire sympathy, which dispose him in everything to minister to men's good. Nothing in human hearts is so radical and ruling. Let a man love, and, without precept, without any other obligation, he will fulfil all law, rejoice in all service, minister all good. It is the test of all our doings. Without love these are all "as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."

To love men is much more than to do right things to them, much more than to help them by beneficences. It is the goodness of heart—sympathy, kindness, tenderness—that prompts all our pity, our succour, our self-denial. It is the test of all our doings towards God and man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself."

"Joy"—another great inspiration of spiritual life. Joy is the child of love. We have joy in our conscious relations to God; joy in our common brotherhood in Christ; joy in God being the fount and inspiration of

our joy in man. "He who loves God loves his brother also"; and love for man is an indication and a test of our love to God. "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And he who loves realises in both God and man the supremest joy of life. To him life, in its relations and experiences, is more fruitful and blessed than it is to any other man. There is no joy like fellowship with God, like the brotherhood of a common spiritual life, like ministry to the misery of men, in the spirit and with the sympathies of Him who "is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." When "the blessings of those ready to perish come upon us," we realise the great paradox of benevolence—"it is more blessed to give than to receive." "We drink of the river of God's pleasures."

"Peace" is the passive form of joy. It is the inner contentment of a man, the harmony of all his convictions and feelings, the rest and satisfaction of his soul in all its relations. It is not insensibility or indifference. In death or in stupor there is peace, in the sense of unconsciousness. We may "make a solitude and call it peace," "Not as the world giveth give I unto you." It is peace in the fullest exercise of faculty, intelligence, sensibility, and affection; peace in intelligent thought of God, in the active play of feeling, in the realisation of spiritual satisfactions; a peace of God that "rules in the heart," that "keeps the heart and mind" as soldiers keep a garrison; a peace that "passeth all understanding."

"Long-suffering"—not in mere passiveness, but in voluntary activity of thought and doing; steady, patient endurance, not of suffering only, but of wrong and provocation. Perhaps there is no more distinc-

tive mark of moral perfection, when, in virtue of holy principles and solitudes, "patience has its perfect work." The strong man is not the spasmodic violent man, but the calm, self-controlled man. "Charity suffereth long and is kind."

"Gentleness"—considerate kindness of manner; power used, service rendered, benevolence exercised with delicate considerateness; graciousness of speech and bearing, pleasing others to their edification, bearing patiently with weakness, ignorance, perverseness; the great aim of all that we do, not to exact homage or praise for ourselves, but to be "helpers of each other's joy." In relation to those who suffer and are weak and helpless, patience in bearing their disabilities, the absence of the querulousness, the complaining, the self-will, the fractiousness, the egotism whereby weak people often make themselves so intolerable and tyrannical. Gentleness in sustaining personal infirmities, in maintaining convictions, often narrow crotchets, in seeking and accepting benevolent help, is, I think, a far more difficult, and therefore a rarer grace, than gentleness in the use of power or riches.

"Goodness"—which the apostle tells us is so much more than righteousness. It is the atmosphere, the medium, the temper, in which righteous things are done. It is the light and heat of social life. We feel its presence—a radiancy and joy wherever it is.

"Faith"—brotherly confidence, trustfulness, "the charity that believeth and hopeth all things." Selfish men are always distrustful of others. Like water, moral feeling never rises above its own level. Where there is not trust, the brotherhood and joy of life are violated. Social life is filled with suspicion, animosity, and envyings; class is arrayed against class, and sect

against sect. Instead of putting upon things the best construction, and winning confidence by manifesting this, there is "anger and strife and every evil work."

"Meekness"—one of the beatitudes of our Lord; the special grace of which He instances Himself as an example, and to which He ascribes a conquering power—"the meek shall inherit the earth." Meekness is closely allied to gentleness. Gentleness refers rather to conduct; meekness to disposition. The meek man is really the strong man. Disposition subdues more than action does—"the spirit of power comes as a dove"; "the lion of the tribe of Judah" is a Lamb. He is a meek man who respects others, who never asserts himself so as to wrong or worry them, who does not "think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Meekness is not cowardliness, mean-spiritedness, feebleness; it is the strong restraint of self by just self-estimate, and by generous consideration for others. Nothing is grander in a man; it is "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

"Temperance"—measured self-control in all lawful things. Not asceticism, which is often intemperate and intolerant, but the wise and right use of things; the religious control of every appetite and passion, of every imagination and conceit—"temperance in all things."

What a galaxy of moral beauties it is! And all, you will note, inward and spiritual. All, too, like the beatitudes, types of what we may call feminine virtues; so different from the rough, boisterous, ostentatious virtues of the world's typical manhood. What emphasis Christ put upon such virtues! For the first time in the world's history He made them supreme. He who was "made of a woman" without earthly father-

hood thus makes goodness tender, beautiful, feminine, rather than masculine.

Is not such a life the true corrective of all mere ritualism? It transcends all law, all keeping of commandments, all mere Church relationships or Church rites, all mere bustling activity. Law says, "Thou shalt *do*;" Christ says, "Thou shalt *be*." It is not the obligation of a servant; it is the free life of a son—the man free to choose and act, Christ his model, the life within him quickened by the Spirit of God, his manhood perfected in grace and virtue. Against such qualities, Paul says, "there is no law." Life is lifted above the province of law. The man is "a law to himself." Did we but realise such Christian manhood, what a conquering force in the world Christianity would be! What could resist such goodness and grace?

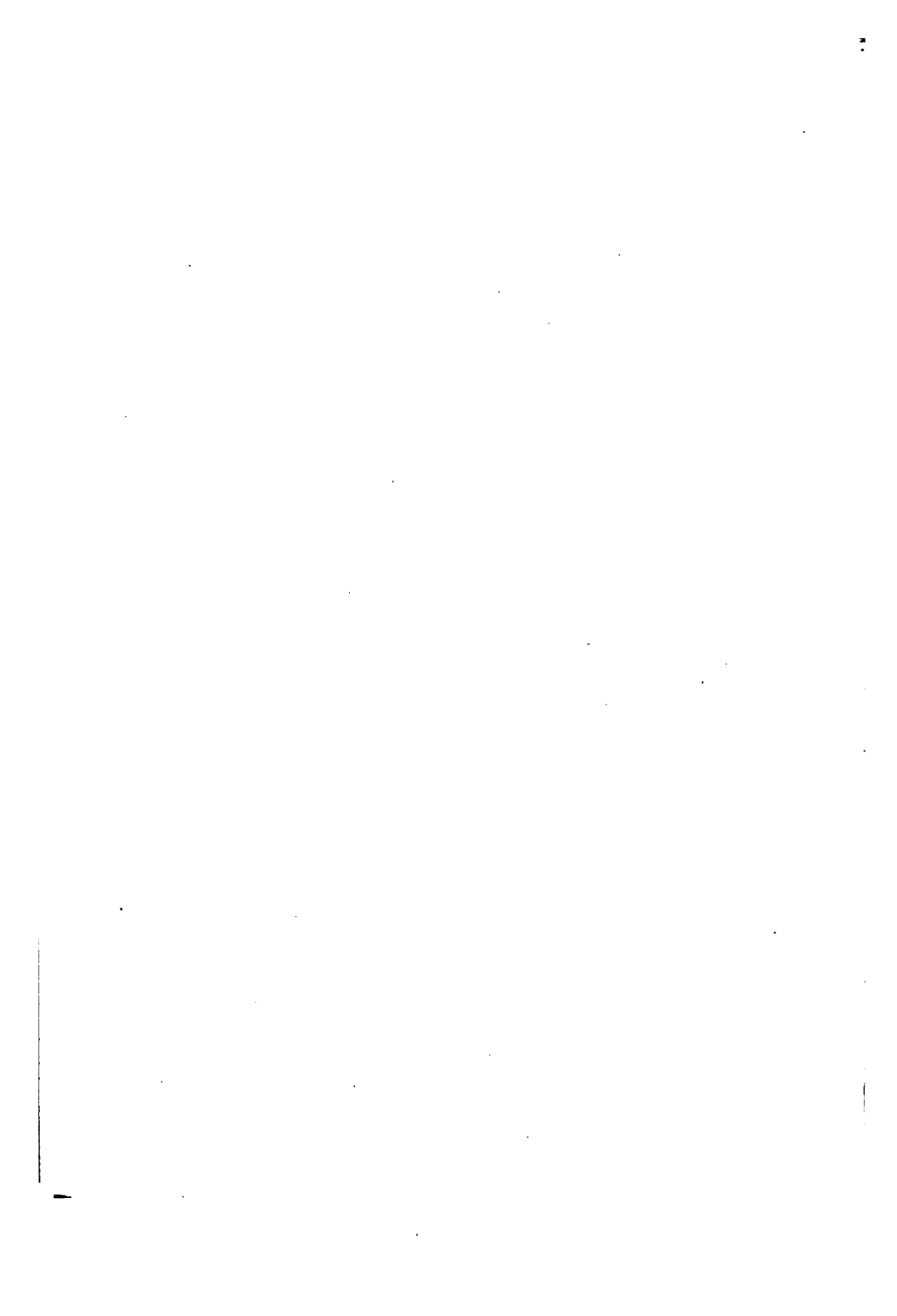
This, then, is the true Christian life of a man. It is the consummation and crown of all religion. It is a conclusive answer to all questionings. "What is your morality?" It is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Can any morality transcend these? What is your creed? Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Can any dogmas more fully express the divine idea of religion? What is your Church? Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Can any Church character transcend these? It is the spiritual answer of Christianity to every institutional imperative. I refuse to believe in any creed or Church that does not produce them. I must recognise as a brother in Christ every man in whom I see them; no matter where I may find him—in Churches, superstitious, heretical, or disorderly. If he bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, he

is a spiritual disciple of Christ, and a true brother to me.

Brethren, test your religiousness in this spiritual, vital way. All other tests are worthless. If your life does not abound in these fruits of the Spirit, whatever Church you may belong to, whatever ritual you may practise, you are deceiving yourselves. Let "these things be in you and abound"; be thus "filled with the Spirit." This will constitute a brotherhood in Christ that is inviolable, that even our own intolerance cannot invalidate.

Let your daily litany be, "That it may please Thee to give to all Thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly Thy word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit." "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord."

THE GRACE OF THE LIPS.



THE GRACE OF THE LIPS.

“He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.”—PROV. XXX. 11.

HOW the practical life of the Bible dominates its theology! How cogently it plies the conscience of men! How persistently it aims at their practical life! All sane conduct is inspired by ideas; and the religious life of the Bible has its reason and inspiration in its theological ideas—its recognitions of God and of Christ. But theological ideas are always presented on their ethical side, and always urged to their religious ends. The great aim of the book is to make us practically holy. It does not gratify metaphysical thought or speculative curiosity; it does not tell us anything about God or about Christ that is not intended for practical religious uses. Things that cannot be made use of in actual life are eschewed.

Proverbs, of course, present life on its practical side. They are maxims and apothegms which seek to crystallize great principles, or to formulate important maxims of life. They are intended as a kind of *vade mecum* for practical use, the fruit of the collective wisdom of men, shaped, as stones of the sea are shaped, by the constant tides of human thought. Proverbs are not made, they grow; only some sagacious genius prepares a mould for the molten metal, and giving it a last

touch, fixes its final form. Solomon was one of these, Cervantes was another, George Eliot another.

How directly and resistlessly these proverbs, or medallion parables, strike down to the very heart of things, unbare the very constituents of our life, and either nurture them or lay the axe to their roots. As in a lightning flash cleaving the dense darkness, we see more vividly in its gleaming than we should in the steady daylight. Proverbs teach us more and impress us more than essays or canons.

We feel the power that there is in putting things—in thoughts fitly chosen, in words deftly adjusted. Like poetry, proverbs enshrine precious things in beautiful forms that abide in our memories, and are an inspiration in our hearts for ever. With what a pliant familiarity, a pungent power, they lay themselves along the path of our daily life, touch all our belongings—things remotest from us as well as things nearest to us, things of our most secret soul as well as things of our passing touch—connecting, in the subtlest way, shrewdness with morality, morality with religion, and everything with God.

You get no morbid pietism, no unnatural asceticism, no dubious compromise. With simple, brusque power, they strike the great chords of the soul; they speak to both heart and life; they are as seed in which whole harvests of life lie latent; concentrated essences, upon which hungry souls may live; packets of portable wisdom, patent to the feeblest mind, and adhesive to the most forgetful. They connect the homeliest things of life with the principles of the divine order; so human that they make the Bible a book of life for this world, so subtly spiritual that they make it a revelation of the hereafter.

Here is one of them ; perfect, as we at once feel, in its form, and philosophical and profound in its wisdom : "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the King shall be his friend." How comprehensive and suggestive it is ! The germs of a whole philosophy of life are in it—the power of all the things of a man, within and without—in germinal feeling, in uttered speech, in practical influence ; his heart, his life, his relations ; what he is as God knows him, what he is as man sees him, what his destiny as heart and life work it out for him ; purity of heart, holy speech, God's favour and help.

What, then, is pure-heartedness, and what comes out of it ? What is its moral beauty, and what its gracious affluence ?

As always, religion deals in the most radical manner with a man. His heart is the root out of which grow all the branches and twigs of life, the fountain whence all the streams of life flow, the source of all that he purposes and does and is. The action, the habit, is only the resultant movement of the man. It may be real or artificial. A habit may be put on like a coat ; things may be done from policy, from fancy, from pique. If you are a keen observer, you may infer a man's heart from his habit ; but it is only an inference, and may, therefore, be mistaken. You see only what the habit indicates.

The only religion that attempts to deal with men's hearts is the religion of the Bible. Men shrink from making laws which they cannot administer. Only the Divine Omniscience can legislate for the heart of a man and make it responsible. God knows its secret workings, whether it be true or false, loving or selfish. Other religions content themselves with laws for the habit.

Their formula is, "Do this"; and if a man does it they are satisfied. The formula of the Bible is, "Be this"; and unless we *be*, all our doing is rejected as false and worthless. Unless I have charity, all my good doing is worthless. If I do not love God, I do not fulfil the law. God's demand is, "My son, give Me"—not thy hand, thy foot, thy voice, thy service, but—"thine heart." It is the entire code of Christ: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself. Upon these two commands hang all the law and the prophets." The demand is simply true love of heart, the life is left to spring out of that. Thus God deals simply, profoundly, with that which no one else can deal with; and, from Genesis to Revelation, this is the uniform religious demand of the Bible.

"Purity of heart"; clean, pious-heartedness; inherent qualities of truth and holiness; sympathies with what is worshipful, holy, and gracious towards God and towards men—this is the uniform criterion of religiousness.

Religion, therefore, begins—the work of God's Spirit begins—not by reforming the man's life, but by renewing his heart. Let but a true spiritual life be quickened within him and his ethics may be left to themselves.

The heart of a truly spiritual man will always be better than his life. He yearns and strives after more than he attains. "When he would do good, evil is present with him." "It is not I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me—so then I myself with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." The will, the sympathies, the efforts of the spiritual man, are on the side of good. If he do evil, it is not so much because he purposes it, as because he is overcome of

temptation. He contends against evil, is abashed and distressed when he falls. Lusts of the flesh overpower the desires of the soul. He feels as if chained to a body of death. Peter could appeal from his base cowardice to his true heart—"Thou knowest that I love thee"—even with the sin and shame of his fall so keen in his consciousness. It was not the purposed sin of a depraved heart, nor the indifferent sin of a selfish heart; it was the cowardly sin of a loving heart: "the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak." The good man condemns himself in falling more than others condemn him. God only knows his agonies in yielding. Many a man who falls is a better man than another who, through mere prudential calculations, is without outward reproach. The Prodigal's sin was better than the elder brother's conceit and intolerance of goodness. Publicans and harlots even may be nearer the kingdom of Heaven than Pharisees.

"He that *loveth* pureness of heart." It is the passion for purity—the passion of desire in striving after it, the passion of delight in realizing it. I exult in my moral purity and power more than in any other possession or faculty. I would sooner be a pure-hearted man, truthful and upright, than the guilty possessor of the amplest wealth. I would rather, with a child's heart, pray a child's prayer, than be the author of all that profligate genius has achieved.

If a lover of pure-heartedness, I shall bring all things to its test. I shall prefer the companionship of a pure-hearted man to that of men, highest in rank, who are corrupt. Better to pray in a cottage than to revel in a palace. Better the converse of a simple saint than the most brilliant talk of ribald wits; than the most riotous

mirth of unclean men, whose dirty, dunghill minds are feculent with coarse stories or impure allusions. Better the dullest book—if goodness needs be dull, a supposition which our affluent literature makes an absurdity—than all the licentious poetry, the prurient, scrofulous novels that are written. If my love of pure-heartedness is not so strong as my admiration for great intellect, I am only a pretender to goodness. The most prosy purity will offend a pure-hearted man less than the most brilliant lasciviousness. To the really pure all that is impure is positively painful. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" If I can furtively read with pleasure foul books, then my own heart is foul. So with my pleasures. If I love pureness of heart, I shall permit, in my habit, nothing that will corrupt and debase, nothing that will stimulate to evil or suggest it, nothing that will come with a shock, or in any way disconcert my purest feelings. Whatever enfeebles or chills virtuous sympathy, I shall instinctively eschew. My guide is not prudence, my rule or process is not calculation. I am impelled by strong moral instincts and sympathies. "The throne of iniquity" can have no fellowship with God. "The friendship of the world is enmity against God." The man who honestly loves pureness of heart will sacrifice everything for its gratification. The measure in which we do this is the true measure of our love for it.

"Grace of the lips" is the natural and necessary outcome of purity of heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "Out of the good treasure of his heart the man bringeth forth good things."

Think of the grace and charm of pure speech—a man whose conversation never corrupts, or suggests evil, but is always seasoned with the salt of his pure-heartedness.

A man's speech is the truest expression of his

thoughts. Its topic, tone, and temper are always the promptings of his moral nature. Speech is the blossom of a man's life, and it is fair or foul, fragrant or offensive, according to his character. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." Men may, by policy and purpose, by art and vigilance, do something to conceal the genuine promptings of the heart, but no care can hinder speech from somewhat tending to its dominant feeling, from being somewhat coloured by its tinge.

"Filthy communications proceeding out of your mouth." Think of some men's speech! Who would think of applying to them the phrase "grace of the lips"? The coarse licentiousness, the obscene allusion, the luscious jest, the half-suppressed anecdote, the sly innuendo, show terribly enough how far from them the love of pure-heartedness is. Those who join in the libidinous laugh, and, may be, compete with the salacious conversation, are the first to feel how ugly it is. Who speaks of the grace of blasphemy, the grace of obscenity, the grace of lying, the grace of slander, the grace of envious depreciation? No one thinks of them as lovely. No man is really so scorned as the man of untruthful, impure, uncharitable speech. All men know him, and no one who knows him esteems him.

On the other hand, what a genuine, satisfying, moral beauty there is in a pure-hearted man! What a recognised grace sits upon his lips—what a moral charm there is in his conversation! Think of some lofty-toned man, or pure, gracious woman, whom you know, and recall the feeling excited by every conversation, by every remembrance.

The grace of the lips takes many forms. Conversation is one of them; honest, pure-hearted speech—the speech that no deceit makes ambiguous, that no slander

makes rancid, that no impurity taints. How precious to our life the converse of some men is ! They do not preach to you, they do not load their conversation with texts or scraps of hymns, they are free as the light, fitful as the wind, ready for whatever may be the topic of the day ; they talk about common things, but with an indefinable grace, a subtle sanctity, adorning and enriching their speech. You feel better for their contact, as men feel when they have had a brisk walk ; you have been braced as with a tonic, sanctified as by a charm. You are a healthier, nobler man. He spake but common words, but he suffused them with his own pure-heartedness. It does not need Church speech to make us feel the influence of a pure-hearted man. Expression in itself, indeed, is a grace, and all pure-hearted men have not grace of expression ; but the substance of the speech is more than its form. When a man does possess a large gift of eloquent speech—speech, wise, simple, impressive, nobly inspired and sanctified by lofty thoughts, felicitous phrase, and pure feelings—what an amazing power he wields ! When a true heart is there, men instinctively feel it. The mere speech does not suffice. There are many men whose speech is very godly speech—solicitously so ; and yet they do not impress you. Their speech is not the outcome of the entire man : it is a religious duty, a Church habit, a policy, perhaps a cant. It is not the unaffected, spontaneous utterance of a simple, pure heart.

Its goodness may be genuine, but it is not entire goodness. Pure-heartedness may be there, and yet the grace of the lips be absent. The defect of some goodness is its sternness : it is ascetic, it lacks sweetness ; it is intolerant, it lacks charity ; it is conceited, it lacks humility. It cannot, therefore, enthrone grace upon

the lips : it is a severe, repelling goodness. All goodness is not grace. There is a goodness that one admires more than loves. The grace of pure-hearted speech is genial, tolerant, loving, full of sensibilities and sympathies, rejoicing in all good, ingenious in discerning good. What love lay at the heart of a man like Paul ! What a large construction of charity in his estimates ; what grace upon his fervent lips ! What love filled the pure heart of Christ ; and what precious words proceeded out of His mouth !

The grace of the lips is not by any means mere religious talk—the solemn injunction, the facile phrase, the familiar text, the conventicle tone—which often hinders grace rather than helps it. It is the simple flower of a true godly heart, equally fragrant everywhere, and on every theme. A pure heart conceives of all things purely, and out of its abundance it speaks.

Nor is the grace of the lips prudery—the over-consciousness that suspects wrong, puts sinister constructions upon innocent words. Over-sensitiveness is not delicacy ; it is the very opposite of delicacy. No indelicacy is worse than the nasty ideas of prudish people. Their thought of evil clothes unsuspecting speech with its own ominous garment. Genuine pure-heartedness is too “ simple concerning evil ” to suspect it in others. Only they who have morbid affinities with evil have such keen scent for it. “ To the pure all things are pure.” They put a pure construction upon even things that are doubtful—infuse their own quality into everything. Genuine purity will restrain and subdue all impure things ; hinder them from revealing themselves, even from being. It has the blessed faculty of seeing less evil than there is. The subtler forms of impurity are cognisable only to impure eyes. So, by an inverse law,

only "the pure in heart see God." Just as an impure heart will elicit whatever in us is impure, so a pure heart will elicit whatever is good. It appeals to sympathy ; our better feelings are brought into play, while our bad ones are held in abeyance. We make our own moral world. Everything is to us according to our sympathies with it. The purest hearted find most of good in their fellow men.

What a grace of the lips godly speech is, when, as he often will, a pure-hearted man does speak of the spiritual things of God ! "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Few things are more repellent than godly speech on unholy lips ; nothing is more beautiful than the holy speech of godly men, the grace of the lips finding its crown in the loftiest things. How nobly, spiritually, fervently a man who loves God will speak of Him ! How little he can love, upon whose lips things touching the King find no place !

How gracious the wisdom of a pure-hearted man ! How keen his discernment ; how true his judgments ! Pure feeling is the condition of all right-seeing. Again, we bring with us what we see ; the eye colours its own objects. He who is not pure in heart has no faculty for discerning spiritual things. God Himself may manifest Himself, I cannot behold Him ; I stand unsuspecting amid the chariots and horses of God ; the Bible reveals to me none of its spiritual light, only its intellectual propositions. From the seraphim to the lowliest moral being, each sees according to its own capability of seeing ; the most brilliant in intellect may be the blindest in spirit. Your last regenerated pauper shall speak more spiritual wisdom than your greatest unregenerated philosopher. Spiritual discernment is an

intuition of spiritual souls, a thing of sympathy, of congruity, of touch ; only the speech of a pure-hearted man can have spiritual wisdom, and grace, and unction. Pure-heartedness gives its last finish to intelligence, its hue of healthfulness, its cast of greatness to even speech on the commonest topic. Nothing gives such intelligence to ignorant men as piety. Let a man's heart be purified, and a light is shed about his whole being ; he sees everything in new lights, feels towards everything with new sympathies.

What a grace of speech is prayer—the holiest and most reverent of our words and attitudes ; man speaking to God—the creature to the Creator ; the greatest among his fellows, lowly and simple as a little child, in pure-hearted speech telling God his wants and sins, asking His mercy, avowing his admiration and worship and love ! In all its forms holiness is beautiful, but the very beauty of holiness is worship—the worship of the man, the worship of the great congregation, a thousand voices consentaneously uplifted, a thousand hearts throbbing with reverent joy, standing face to face with the unseen, the spiritual, and realising it intensely—silently, rapturously communing with the Infinite.

Prayer has even a form of speech of its own. What a solemn, earnest thing it is ! All hard things are excluded from it. Its words are lowly, subdued, beseeching, full of gentleness, and of lofty desire ; undevout words in prayer jar and shock all our sensibilities : rash and pretentious eloquence offends us. Nothing has such a charm, such a subduing power, as the humble, contrite, pleading words of prayer—the simple stammering out, it may be, of real spiritual desire. Nothing draws men together so closely as common prayer—the common utterance of the secret things of the soul to God. Listen

to the prayer of an earnest man. How far down into his soul you can see! He can utter the profoundest, the most individual experiences; there is no sense of impropriety, of indelicacy. Let him speak to God the things that are really in him, and you see to the very bottom of his heart. Nothing reveals a man like his prayer.

Even the cry of guilt, the first wail of penitence, the publican's self-upbraiding, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is full of moral beauty. It is the beginning of pure feeling. Sorrow for wrong is always the beginning of right. But when a pardoned man, whom God has forgiven and to whom He has revealed His love, kneels down like a little child at his father's knee, and pours out his confidence, tells all his sins, and sorrows, and fears, his needs, his hopes, his joys, it is an ineffable grace of the lips; the truest speech of the heart in its most spiritual moods.

And a pure-hearted man has things to testify to others; he speaks about what God has done for him, about what God will do for them. What a grace of the lips is the eloquence that a lofty theme and a pure heart inspire! How poor and tinselly in comparison the words of the professional preacher! How impertinent the art of the conventional orator! What is the art of the orator? Is not the reply of Demosthenes, "Action, action, action," superficial and mechanical? Must we not rather say, emotion, experience, quick mysterious sympathy? How poor the most eloquent words that are not felt; how powerful the very poorest that are!

And how urgent pure-heartedness is; how it constrains words to the sinful, testimony of Him who forgives sin, who makes the sinful holy; "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." "Necessity

is laid upon me—yea, woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel”; preach it to all who need it, preach it according to the gift I have. A full heart makes an eloquent tongue, compels strenuous effort to serve men. No grace of the lips can equal that of a pure-hearted man, who, standing at the corner of a London street, or in some crowded alley, tells men of the salvation of Christ. “How beautiful the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace!”

“The king shall be his friend.” A proverbial putting of the favour that he shall find—he shall win social confidence and honour. Wise kings choose wise men for their counsellors; and in politics, in business, in social life, in private fellowship there is no wisdom like the wisdom of goodness. An upright man shall be called the king’s friend.

How rapidly good men win confidence! what respect for character they secure! what weight for their counsel! To whom do we so readily go in trouble? For whom do we first send on deathbeds? Even those who dislike them secretly honour them.

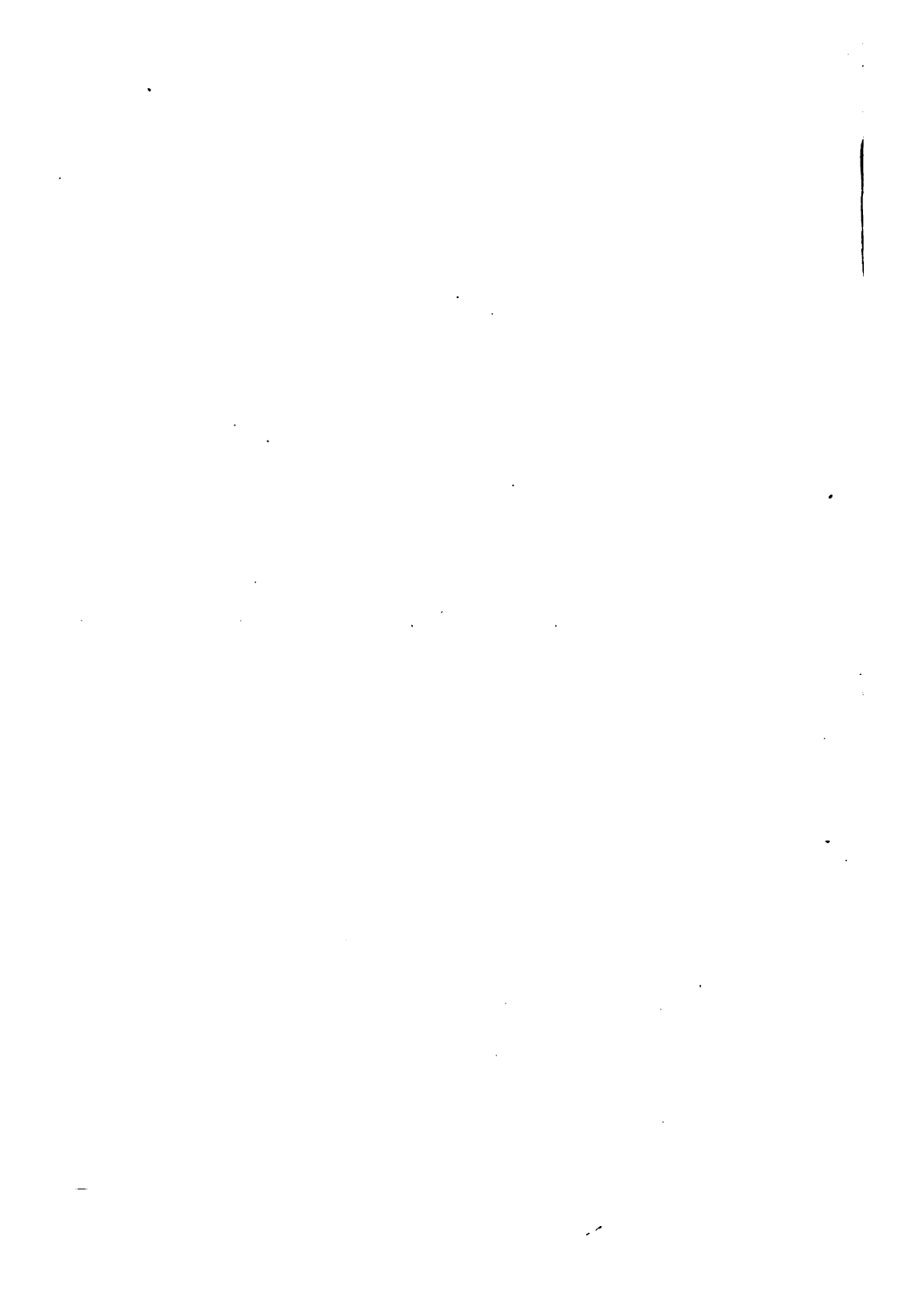
The King of kings shall be his friend—He whose delights are with goodness, whose rule is blessed because it is righteous. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.” God takes pure-hearted men into His counsel; He keeps a book of remembrance when they speak to each other; He listens when they pray; they commune with Him by day; His song is with them in the night; He blesses their speech; “confirms their word with signs and wonders following.” He is the friend of all who witness or work for Him; “Lo, I am with you alway even to the end of the world.”

Can anything be greater than pureness of heart? It is the means of all knowledge, the secret of all wisdom.

The pure in heart see God. As we love we know. How little they understand the secret of the Lord who seek it in ways of philosophy ; or understand the Bible who come to it with a mere apparatus of philology ! How much more profound and penetrating the ways of a pure heart, of a keen sympathy, of a yearning, listening spirit. We understand God by his indwelling ; intellectual subtlety is utterly blind compared with a holy heart. And if we would serve God by speech, by conversation, by prayer, by preaching, the best preparation is the preparation of sanctity ; not to the neglect of laborious study, but as the prime qualification for it, and the essential inspiration of its products. A holy life with its foundations laid deep in humility and prayer is the essential requisite for a successful worker.

“ Keep, then, your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life ;” that you may have the spiritual prerogative of coming near to God, so as to see Him and understand Him, and so be able to open your lips concerning Him, that men may “ wonder at the gracious words that proceed out of your mouth.”

THE POWER OF GOD'S GENTLENESS.





THE POWER OF GOD'S GENTLENESS.

"Thy gentleness hath made me great."—PSALM XVIII. 35.

A SENTENCE like this, falling from the pen of genius, is a revelation of both thought and feeling. It is like a door opened in Heaven. It brings into harmony such apparent incongruities, that for a moment we are almost startled. But genius and truth shine in their own light. We immediately feel that it is a true seer who speaks ; that he has revealed to men an unsuspected relationship ; that he has propounded a new principle in the philosophy of life. So men like Homer, Shakespeare, and Bacon illumine and enrich the intellectual domain of life ; so Hebrew prophets and psalmists, so Christ and His apostles, enrich the religious domain. They utter axioms and sentences of religious truth and relations which are revelations and inspiring forces.

David, whose psalm this unquestionably is, was now an old man. This is probably the swan-song of his life. The historian of the Book of Samuel tells us that it was composed as a thanksgiving of life, "after the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies." It is a religious retrospect, a religious estimate of all his experiences, a record of his religious trust and blessing. God had taught him and kept him in all the varied experiences of life, and had perfected his religious character. His

THE POWER OF GOD'S GENTLENESS.

Judgment of the process is a boundless appreciation of God's goodness, and of the marvellous effects that it had produced. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." "By Thy forbearance and graciousness Thou hast purified, enlarged, and perfected me."

David had a perception of God's methods wonderfully delicate and profound ; as also of the subtle workings of human feeling. Only a very profound spiritual philosophy could have recognised gentleness and greatness as cause and effect—gentleness in God producing greatness in us. And the way in which this is expressed is very felicitous. Only a rich poetic imagination could have embodied the thought in a phrase so simple, suggestive, and beautiful. The religious value of beautiful expression is very great. Religious feeling is closely connected with the sentiment to which poetry specially appeals. Hence the devotional parts of Scripture are poetical in form, while its doctrinal teachings are prose. The theologian reasons ; the religious man feels—sings his psalm, gives imaginative form to his sentiment.

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Expressions such as this are the glory of the Psalms. They fill the ear like music, they refresh the heart like dew, they steal into our prayers ; we borrow them for the expression of our religious thought and feeling, and they make it beautiful and tender. They refine and inspire the sentiment that they clothe. We scarcely know which to admire most, the spiritual significance of the truth or the inspiring felicity of its expression.

How tenderly we urge apt and beautiful phrase in prayer ! How greatly we are moved by felicitous psalm or hymn ! How eloquent words move us in preaching, where the same truth in feeble or rugged or awkward

words would leave us unmoved ! The heart retains the most tenaciously that which the imagination shapes for it. A verse of a hymn will often do what a sermon fails to do. It will flash light into our most moody darkness, and instil comfort into our most morbid feeling. We cling to it in the shipwreck of joy and hope. Listen :

"Other refuge have I none ;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee ;
Leave, ah ! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed ;
All my help from Thee I bring ;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

What is its spell ? It teaches no new truth. It simply puts familiar truth in a form of exquisite beauty, in which both imagination and heart delight. How its rich and softened music reverberates through the dreary caverns of the soul ! How it stills our tumults and comforts our sorrows ! we scarcely know why. It is the artless beauty of expression that holds the truth in our heart through the imagination.

Thus the twenty-third Psalm trembles upon dying lips. When we can reason no longer, we can feel. When too feeble to shape forms of expression for ourselves, we find them prepared for our use in forms of exquisite beauty. When reasoning can no longer sustain Luther's courage, inspiration comes in the singing of the fortieth Psalm. Many a godless man has been smitten into penitence by the sudden recollection of some domestic, or Sunday-school, or sanctuary hymn, coming like the sound of village bells to charm, or like the still small voice of God to subdue. It has a "gentleness which makes us great."

One marvels at such great conceptions as this in an

age so ignorant and rude. Spiritual life gives us strange insights. Gentleness is almost the last conception of divine power that men attain to. In rude states of social life the Beatitudes are an impossible conception. Men cannot rise higher than the Ten Commandments. Our most obvious conception of divine power is physical almightiness, and of divine rule that it should be sternly enforced. We resent the idea of tolerating rebellion or resistance. Hence heathen deities are incarnations of self-willed force—sternly ruling, pitilessly scourging the world of men. It takes ages of moral culture and growth to demonstrate the power and the grandeur of a rule of love; to conceive a Deity moved, not only by righteousness to control and punish transgressing men, but by yearning pity and love to redeem and restore them.

How the revelation of the Jewish Jehovah as a God of gentleness and tender mercy must have astonished the old pagan world! What a novelty and a rapture it was to the Jews themselves! How the psalmists expatiate on it, magnify it, shout in laudation of it! What great words they devise for its expression! How fondly they cling to its idea! How the revelation of God's love in the incarnate, the redeeming Christ pervades and imbues the New Testament with its sentiment!—an Almighty who is gentle, a sovereign Deity full of tender, patient, self-sacrificing love.

But even yet, after two thousand years of Christian teaching, how imperfectly we realise it! How little faith we have in the power of magnanimous gentleness, dealing tenderly with an offender, loving an enemy, striving, by patient, forbearing, gracious ways, to convert him into a friend!

By gentle, patient methods God wins back to Him-

self those who have rebelled against Him and revolted from Him, subdues our waywardness, teaches and perfects us. He does not coerce us by His power; He constrains us by His love. He does not launch His thunderbolt to destroy us; He solicits penitence and obedience, waits patiently, deals gently with our passion and petulance, our ignorance and unbelief; gives us time for reflection and experiment, for the cooling of passion, the growth of wisdom, the rectifying of mistakes. He "waits to be gracious." Not of Himself and of His insulted majesty does He think, so as to assert His greatness, but of us and of our suicidal alienation from Him, and how He may make us great.

Is it not a grand conception of Deity? Because He is God, He can thus be great. Because He is eternal, He can thus wait patiently. Only the weak and foolish are peremptory and violent. Because He is almighty and eternal, He is full of pitying, fatherly love. He knows no pride, no passion, no impatience. In sublime self-forgetfulness, He simply seeks to make us great.

How we lose sight of this divine form of power, this divine temper of authority! Stern rulers make vindictive and therefore feeble and short-sighted laws. Severe fathers rule rigidly in their households, and forego the potent and precious influences of affection. Hard theologians and preachers represent even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as a stern magistrate, a resentful ruler. What repellent pictures of His almightiness, His sovereignty, His predestinating purpose, His retributive administration they draw!

If it be the sublimest revelation of God that He is loving and gentle, is it not also the conception of God which is the hardest for us to learn? It is comparatively easy to imagine His power, His resistless will, His

but

stern retributiveness ; but the most difficult of all lessons is the glorious power of His love. It is the "mystery hidden from ages and generations."

What a field of illustration opens out to us ! I can touch only one or two points.

Is there not significance in this remarkable teaching of the Bible concerning God ? Just now we encounter many disparaging and almost contemptuous criticisms of the Bible as claiming to be a revelation from God. It is unhistorical ; it is self-contradictory ; its morality is questionable ; it is unworthy of religious reverence.

Well, but amid all its defects, we find this wonderful conception of God ; which, however, these captious critics say very little about. On any theory, Moses wrote before Plato, David sang before Homer. Who would venture even to suggest a comparison between Homer's Zeus and the Jehovah of the Book of Genesis, between the Homeric poems and David's Psalms ? It is not merely a difference of degree, it is a difference of radical conception. How came the writer or editor of the Book of Genesis, or of the Pentateuch, to rise so transcendently above the general conception and treatment of mankind as to delineate a Deity perfectly pure and infinitely gracious—a delineation perfectly consistent, and yet coloured with the Chaldean feeling of Genesis, the Egyptian feeling of Exodus, the wilderness feeling of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy ? Is there among all the imaginations of men any other conception of a loving Almightiness ? Is not the criticism that will not even consider a great moral characteristic like this suspiciously inimical, or contemptibly shallow ?

Take, for illustration, the conception of the sin of

man as represented in the first three chapters of Genesis.

Man sins against his holy, beneficent Creator. Is the idea that of resentment, retribution only—to punish, to disable, to destroy? Nay, rather to restore, to exalt, to bless.

Had God been like other deities He would have imposed Herculean tasks. He would have visited rebellion with instant retribution. The great distinctive representation is of sorrowful, patient, remedial mercy. Simple retribution would have destroyed; He “devises means whereby His banished ones be not expelled from Him.”

True, the transgression is followed by the retribution, “The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die.” But the very sentence is accompanied by a promise of redemption. Even when the curse is being pronounced by the lips that cannot lie, by the righteousness that cannot falter; even when the necessities of holiness banish the sinner from the paradise that he has defiled, and he stands consciously guilty before his Judge; in that dread moment gracious promise is given, divine compassion breaks forth. A Redeemer is promised, the bow of the covenant of mercy shines upon the black tempest-cloud of wrath, “the loving kindness of God our Saviour appears.” “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” Not after an interval is it said, when the sense of condemnation shall have wrought its disastrous spell, but with a kind of impetuous haste, so that the meaning of the terrible curse is not fully apprehended before the assurance of mercy is received. “God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, saved us by His grace.”

Now, whether these records be history or legend, this is their amazing conception of God. How is it to be accounted for?

If we take the conception of Christ's redemption, we get an illustration of the way in which God's gentleness makes us great that is transcendent. We are raised to a moral greatness which far surpasses that of simple innocence; just as the holiness of a mature man, wrought out by long processes of obedience and trial, is far greater than the innocence of a little child. Is not the redeemed man the noblest type of holiness amongst God's creatures? A holy man is grander than a holy angel—grander in the process of conflict and discipline by which his holiness has been wrought; grander in the type of holy character that has been produced in him. His holiness rests upon nobler principles; is wrought by greater processes; is constrained by loftier motives; attains to intenser raptures. God puts upon us not only the garb of virtue, but the crown of victory; the robe not of innocence merely, but of sanctity and grace. We are "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." The more potent cause produces the greater result. It is the marvellous economy of redeeming grace that sin itself is made to subserve the greatness of salvation. "Where sin abounded, grace much more abounds." So that some of the Roman Christians formed the conception that they might purposely sin in order that grace might abound.

The redeemed man stands "nearest the throne and first in song." He sings a "new song," beside which the rapturous joy of the unfallen is meagre in inspiration. The hallelujah which John heard found its climax not in the song of angels, but in the song of redeemed men celebrating "the Lamb that had been slain."

This, again, whatever else may be said about it, is the transcendent moral conception and transcendent moral power of the redemption from sin of Jesus Christ. Even if its historic reality be denied, it remains the sublimest conception of religious holiness. God's "gentleness makes us great."

Or we might take illustrations from experiences in our individual lives. Only, here the problem is a complicated one. Redemption from a sinful condition has to be effected, a cure has to be wrought. God has to begin, so to speak, with a diseased and disordered moral condition, to correct the wrong-doing of sinful lives. If He be really a loving God, He will, by the infliction of discipline and by sorrowful experiences, seek to make us holy. And these processes, imperative as they are, like the remedies of the physician, are often painful in the endurance. Very tender mercies may be rough in their form. Men who think lightly of sin, who deem it the result of mere circumstances, who disparage all means of deliverance from it, tell you that if there be a God of human life, He is harsh and cruel, that Nature is remorseless, and that if God ordained Nature, He is either weak and has not been able to order it better, or He is cruel and did not care to do so.

Deny human sin, and God's processes of redemption from sin, and it is difficult to gainsay the judgment. Admit them, and you might as well say that the surgeon is cruel when with steady hand and purpose he cauterizes the wound, or amputates the limb; or that the parent is cruel who inflicts painful discipline upon a corrupt and rebellious child. If His love be wise and great, the Father in Heaven will permit us to feel so much of the evil of sin as may turn us from it. He will inflict the discipline necessary to bring us back in penitence to

His feet. We make the conditions, not He. Love, just in proportion as it is strong and wise, will be severe. But let the prodigal repent of his wanderings, come back in penitence to his home, and he will find how tender and patient the yearning love has been. It will break forth in uncontrollable intensity, run forth to meet him, fall on his neck and kiss him, and kill for him the fatted calf.

Oh! it takes a great deal—even the hunger of the far country—to work repentance and right feeling. And the father does not interpose, he lets the misery do its work. Only “the husks that the swine do eat” can awaken desire for the bread of the father’s house. Would it, think you, have been wise love had the father carried the bread to him in the far country, before conscious need and penitent feeling had been wrought in him? God Himself is better than His gifts.

If a refractory child has to be won, or an abandoned criminal to be reclaimed, is not the only effectual way to woo him by gentleness, to win him by love? Would not severity provoke self-justification, resentment, defiance? How impossible it is to coerce men into virtue, to scold them into love! They must be wooed, not smitten, their heart touched by tenderness, subdued by gentleness. Habits may be coerced, hearts can only be won.

Therefore the great Father tells us of the purposes of His love, entreats us by gentle solicitudes, loving beseechings, tender inducements. What terms of pathos can surpass some of the phrases of the Old Testament prophets and psalmists? Only His who invited the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him and rest, who wept over Jerusalem, who prayed for His murderers. Think of His ineffable grace: “Son, be of good cheer,

thy sins are forgiven thee"; "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

Oh, how the pride and intolerance of our meagre virtue contrasts with the pity and gentleness of His perfect holiness! What reproachful words to the erring and sinning we speak! How we goad to defiance hearts that are proud, and crush to despair hearts that are broken! His "gentleness makes us great."

Is not God's ordinary method of conversion some truth to which we are gently led, some spring of tenderness unconsciously touched, some latent affection subtly appealed to? Did you ever know a man converted by the Ten Commandments, or by the Athanasian Creed? Is it not rather some word of ineffable love, some manifestation of "Him whom we have pierced," some yearning of great sorrow, that, filling our heart, has subdued it to penitence or constrained it to prayer? Some calamity has befallen, some sickness nigh unto death, some bereavement of wife, or child; when God has comforted us, or pointed us to "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

So it is in the nurture of our spiritual life. We are sanctified and perfected by gentle processes of God's patience and graciousness. He "leads us into green pastures and beside the still waters." Making fullest allowance for sharp chastisements, how few our griefs compared with our satisfactions! What precious experiences of God's presence and fellowship and helping we have! How all that is best in us is solicited and developed by "His loving kindness and tender mercies"!

How often the mere threatening suffices, and the hand uplifted to smite falls in a caress! Clouds gather, misfortune threatens, ruin stares us in the face. We wait in agonizing suspense for the storm to burst, for the

overhanging rock to fall. By some unexpected change we are mercifully spared, and we are softened into penitent gratitude.

Sickness enters our home. Some precious life hangs in the balance. In breathless suspense we stand in the very valley of the shadow of death or beseech God in agonizing prayer. He is entreated of us. Death has only looked in at the window; his foot has been turned away, and we are spared the maimed and desolate life that threatened. How tender and thankful the deliverance leaves us! How different from even the most pious resignation of bereavement! "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" "I was brought low and He helped me." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." I am holier for my fears, humbler for my realization of helplessness, more trustful for my deliverance, more grateful for my mercies.

And the lesson has been learned not by a heart that sorrow has disabled, but by a heart that is strengthened in gratitude and joy. "His gentleness has made me great."

Or it may be that some special personal sin has subjected me to the possibility of retribution, exposed me to loss of character, to the forfeiture of esteem and affection. I feel how righteous this would be, that "the curse causeless would not come." I am mercifully spared; by some tender forbearance of providential ordering, my sin remains undiscovered; I escape the disgrace and shame. And through life I am humbled by my remembered fall, and by my sense of God's forbearance into a deeper penitence, a more watchful holiness, a more urgent gratitude than any retribution could have wrought. That might have produced only

desperate defiance; "the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance."

So, again, if as workers for God we get to be official, perfunctory, or conceited, "sacrificing to our own net, or burning incense to our own drag," and need to be softened and humbled, God does not embitter and harden us by disappointment. He gives us some precious soul as the result of our poor, unworthy efforts; and I think nothing humbles a man like that.

So, again, in the ordinary ministries of life—His loving kindness and tender mercies, His sympathies and helpings, His promises and blessings! What a vocabulary of gracious recognitions might be culled from the Bible! Listen, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." "Like as a father pitieth His children." "As one whom his mother comforteth." "I will keep thee as the apple of mine eye." "A woman may forget her sucking child; I will not forget thee." They fill the ear like music, they soften the heart like love. What a world of solitudes, sympathies, and ministrings they suggest! How they soften, sanctify, and inspire us! What gentleness they represent! what purposes they inspire! what greatness they produce!

These are but suggestive illustrations of this marvellous conception of God's methods of dealing with us which the Bible presents. Again I ask whence came these ideas? How came these Bible writers so to conceive of God and of His processes?

And how wonderfully our conscious experience of life responds to the representation! So God does deal with us, so our conscious development in religiousness has been wrought. "He doth not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities." We are "besought by the mercies of God." "There is

forgiveness with Him that He may be feared." His constant appeal to us is the appeal of His love. By His love He constrains us. His mercies have been a beseeching appeal to our sense of obligation, an inspiration of our thankful joy. "By His gentleness He has made us great."

Life is attempered and inspired by great sentiments. Take this, then, as a great sentiment of life, a conception of God to rule every recognition of His providence, to inspire every feeling towards Him. More than anything else it will sanctify and ennoble us. How mean and hard the heart that such gentleness cannot touch; that such love cannot constrain; that even the cross and passion of the Christ cannot subdue!

And how strong and glad and noble the heart that is consciously inspired by such grateful recognitions, by the sense of God's gentleness even in His bounties! We have been more than enriched by Him; we have been transformed and renewed. We "love Him because He first loved us." We "are not our own; we are bought with a price."

THE STRONG AND THE WEAK.



THE STRONG AND THE WEAK.

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself."

ROMANS XV. 1—3

THE great principle of practical life which the apostle here propounds is one that only the peculiar sentiment of Christian brotherhood can sustain, or even inspire. "We who are strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak." We who have opportunities and means of self-indulgence are not to use them for mere self-pleasing; we are to please our neighbour so as to edify him; make our means of self-gratification the means of doing him good. And our great sanction and constraint for such a principle and practice of life is the peerless example of Christ. His life was so great and influential because the entire spirit of it was the service and pleasing of others.

It is one presentation of that manifold antagonism to selfishness which is the key to the entire teaching and ministry of Our Lord; here carried into a new and peculiar sphere. Our Lord spoke of giving a cup of cold water in His name, of visiting the sick, of relieving the poor; that is, of the duty and sacredness of benevolent help when men are in necessity or sorrow.

Here the principle is carried farther and higher. While benevolent service is part of the alleviation of

the burdens of the weak, which is incumbent upon the strong, the obligation goes farther than this ; it makes incumbent upon us such a character, such a course of life, and such a deportment as shall be pleasing to those about us, whether rich or poor, whether strong or weak. It is the general obligation of being amiable, and of acting towards others so as to secure their goodwill and their pleasant feelings.

Clearly amiability is not an optional thing, nor is it an unimportant thing. It is represented as entering deeply and even vitally into the religious service of life. According to the law and the spirit of Christ, it is a fundamental obligation to conciliate, to please others in every way that may enable us to benefit them.

If this be not part of the framework of Christian ethics, it is clearly an adjunct of them. If it be not the vital essence or fruit of the Christian life, it is clearly the beauty, the aroma of it. If it be not a feature of the face divine, it is the bright and beautiful expression that irradiates it. If it be not the configuration of the landscape, it is the bright sunlight that illumines its brown clod or its golden corn, and that plays like spiritual beauty upon the grand summits and sides of its mountains, and searches out the gloom of their ravines ; that sparkles like love, and ripples like laughter upon the surface of the lake, turning its lead into silver, and its gloom into gold.

Clearly that is of prime importance, which, although it does not constitute the forms of life, yet creates the spirit of life—the gladness, the light, in which the beauty of life consists, and by which its most vital elements of goodness are nurtured.

Much is said in the Bible about the ministry of joy. It is an injunction often reiterated, and upon which

much emphasis is laid ; not merely that we be holy in the Lord, but that we "rejoice in the Lord"—have a glad experience in our holiness, and let others see that holiness makes us glad. Hence the obligation to make others glad, to help them to realise the duty and the privilege which is so important to ourselves.

And further, it is quite certain that men are benefited as well as gratified by being pleased ; when, that is, it is done in the way which the guarded language of the Apostle intimates.

The spirit or brightness of a man's life acts very powerfully upon the character of it. His mood, his temper has a great deal to do with his goodness. A vexed, disappointed, mortified man—a man who is scorned, or irritated, or chilled by what we do or say, is hardly likely to be thereby improved in goodness. His sympathy is blunted, his inspiration is abated ; his eagerness and his force are reduced.

It does not, of course, follow that you always benefit a man by pleasing him. It is not good for any man to be pampered, to be always indulged in his purpose or his feeling. The moral welfare of a man may demand that we mortify and oppose him. But, the virtue of this depends upon its moral justification. It cannot be a good thing to mortify or oppose any man without a necessity.

Most men have difficulties, troubles, trials, contradictions, sore conflicts enough in the inevitable experiences of life. We have no need to vex and chafe any man on the ground that life is too pleasant for him ; to devise artificial irritations for fear lest he should not have sufficient real ones. It is largely because men have so many real and inevitable troubles that it is made part of the obligation of our Christian brotherhood to please

them, to study the art of bearing their burdens, of making them happy, of causing them to see that the religion of Christ is a solace for trouble, not only in its direct teachings, but in the brotherly ministries that it inspires; that it makes all who receive it gentle, loving, easy to be entreated, ministers of gracious things. If its effect were otherwise—if any of its inspirations made men cantankerous, ill-tempered, selfish, irritating, it would be no social commendation of it.

Its effect upon its disciples is the reverse of all this, it changes the hard, selfish man into a sympathising, self-denying man; the bad-tempered into an amiable man. If it does not, it is simply because it has not been fully received, and permitted to do its work.

Men are most disposed to what is right and good when they are pleased. Joy is strength in many ways. In social co-operation, in family life, good nature is a prime factor of all that is good. "A merry countenance does good like a medicine." How can good be wrought where impatience, selfishness, snappishness, cantankerousness predominate? Nothing flourishes in a snow-storm or an east wind.

So that simply to please men, to charm them into a sympathetic, contented mood is an important part of religious duty and influence.

Not only is it good for others, it is good also for ourselves. When our own faculties and feelings are acting most healthily and beneficially, they are acting benevolently. We cannot make others happy without making ourselves better. A man severely good, a stern, puritanic, unlaughing man, may be a tree of righteousness, but the atmosphere about him is cloudy and cold. He grows as trees grow in northern latitudes; he is not developing life so generously and luxuriantly; he is

not freely unfolding leaf and blossom ; he is not ripening fruits of righteousness to so fine a flavour as he would were the warm sunshine and the gentle atmosphere steeping him and all things in light and love. A man's austerity, or crossness, or spirit of provocation, are morally as deleterious to himself as they are to others.


How largely and wonderfully God has made provision for the simple pleasures of life ! What beautiful things he has made for the eye ; what pleasant things for the taste ; what harmonies for the ear ; what delicious sensations for the heart ! "He has made everything beautiful in its time." And beauty is God's ministry to our pleasure.

The hard spirit of utilitarianism has a very small place in the creation of God. The useful is everywhere ; but a large part of its use is the ministry of pleasure. Beauty, fragrance, sweetness, simply for pleasing, are everywhere in profusion. Appraise God's earth on severe principles of political economy, or of utilitarian philosophy, you have an intractable quantity designed and adapted simply for giving pleasure. If God makes a rock, He must needs cover and colour it with lichens ; if a mountain, He bathes it in evanescent beauty of light and shade ; if a flower, He paints it with curious pencil and most delicate hues. The winter snowstorm, the driving rain, the wild storm-cloud have a beauty equal to that of the meridian sunlight. Beauty, music, sweetness, love are a great deal more than bread to eat, and companions to help me.

How much in our own being is designed and adapted to give pleasure—symmetry, beauty, motion, speech, sensibility, the buoyant life of the child, the poetic fervours of the lover, the tender heart of wife and child and friend ; elasticity of the mind, the wit, the humour,

the poetry of the intellect ; the sympathy, the benevolence of the heart ! God help the man who thinks he can account for God's creation on principles of political or commercial economy.

These elements of beauty and pleasure are all God's gifts. They are part of the religion of life. Religion has to do with them ; not to take and rebuke and mortify and destroy them, as if they were tares among the wheat, but to tend and nurture and perfect them as part of the very wheat itself. Why should life be maimed by destroying its pleasures, and making it melancholy ? God has put the golden dust upon the wing of the butterfly, the opal bloom upon the skin of the peach. Am I with a rough finger to rub it off in the name of religion ? Nay, verily. If I do, instead of clearing the ground for religious growth, I rob religion of some of its richest element of nurture. Why should I bark out religious things like a terrier, when I might sing them like a nightingale ? Is the truth any truer for being made stern ? Is it not a great deal less true ? Are not its gentleness and love part of it ? Are not "the things that are lovely and of good report" equally vital with "the things that are true and honest and just" ?



Some people make a virtue of saying disagreeable things, an essential part of which is to say them to your face, in the name of honesty and in the rôle of the candid friend. For my own part, I wish they wouldn't. I would much rather they would say them behind my back. Why should I hear them ? I am sure they would do me no good, when the very essence of them, the reason why they are said, is that they are disagreeable. A man is not an insincere man because the law of kindness is upon his lips.

Who are the weak? We all know them, although it may not be very easy to describe them. They are not the wicked. We are under no obligation to please *them*. They are the good, only they are weakly good.

For instance: a man is weakly good whose religious life is regulated by mere rule and precept, who lives according to commandments, who prays at stated hours, who gives according to the law of tithes, who is ritual in worship and in Sabbath-keeping. People who regulate their lives by precepts, their dress by sumptuary laws, who wear Quaker bonnets, who fast on Fridays; who are religious for specified moral reasons, who think that to keep rules for their own sake is perfect goodness, are no doubt good people, and the Ten Commandments are good rules; but to be religious in this way is the very lowest and weakest form of religiousness.

The grade of religious life above this is when men grasp principles instead of rules, and live according to the spiritual interpretation of them; when they understand the reason of rules, and in the freedom of the spirit obey the principle rather than the rule. There are many things which your child cannot understand, but which it is proper for it to do, because such are the rules of your household. He does not know very much about principles of right and wrong, and therefore you give him rules, as God gave to the Israelites the Ten Commandments.

His first great lesson in morals is simple, and, to some extent, blind obedience to them. But, by-and-bye, as he grows up to be a young man, his moral sense is developed, mere rules are relaxed, laid aside even. He learns to act upon principles; he becomes a law to himself. He speaks truth, and is honest; not as a child does, because it is the rule that he should do so, but as

a man does, because it is right. You have very few household or moral rules for your grown-up son. You do not bind him to hours or habits; you trust to the power of principle. The goodness of the child is but weak goodness compared with his goodness of moral principle, of spiritual freedom.

The highest life of all is the life of love—when I am guided neither by mere rules, nor by mere principles, but by instincts and affections of the spiritual life; when the kingdom of God is within me; when I “love the Lord my God with all my heart, and soul, and strength”; when my only care is how to show and to strengthen my love. I care nothing about rules. I never think of them. I do not reason much about principles. I simply live according to the instincts of my spiritual soul, according to the promptings and yearnings of my religious love. That is the highest conceivable religious life; just as the perfect life of friendship is the life that the pure love of friendship prompts. It is the life of the New Testament as contrasted with the life of the Old; the life of the valedictory discourse of our Lord as contrasted with the life of the Ten Commandments—“the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” Under the inspiration of this great law I live. I pray neither three times a day nor seven; I “pray always.” I give neither tithes nor fifths, but “according to my ability.” I attend public worship neither twice nor thrice on Sundays, nor once or twice in the week, but as love prompts and opportunity permits. I keep Sabbath neither by demure looks, nor by silencing music in my house, nor by austere speech, nor by rigid conversational rules, nor by rubrics of devotion, but in the free and joyous life of my spiritual love.

The weak! Who does not encounter them in his circle of religious life? The weak in temper—the peevish, the irritable, the saturnine; touchy under fancied slights, jaundiced in their estimates of things, angry because they are worsted in argument, resentful if not considered at the cost of everybody else.

The weak in judgment—who think everything a sin that is not according to their religious fashion of life or speech; who cannot distinguish circumstances; who make no allowance for changing times or social habits.

The weak in conscience—who make a conscience of a phylactery; who laugh by rubric; who think all merriment unspiritual, all amusement irreligious, all use of lawful things wrong because others abuse them; who would impose sumptuary laws upon households, and enforce asceticism in personal feeling and habit; who see peril in music, and lurking worldliness in art; who think that spirituality consists in abjuring elegant literature, or social amusements.

Such persons bear heavy burdens. The solicitudes and sorrows of their febrile nervous souls are very keen. They know no higher law of life than hard precept and rigid ritual; and they are terrified at the freedoms of men of robust spiritual life. They see a man strong in his conscious love to God, living in the easy freedom of that love; and they think his liberty an unhallowed or perilous licence, which may at any moment betray him to the devil. But, then, so may a broken or a misinterpreted law. Which is the least likely to go wrong—a strong, living principle, or a watchful interpretation of law? My Scottish neighbour hushes his piano on the Sunday, and thinks a walk in the fields perilously profane. I sing my hymn with all the inspirations that music can give. I carry into the fields a bright piety

of heart. Which is most likely to be faithful—the austere gloom, or the joyful love?

What am I to do with weak people? I am to bear their burdens; enter into the ignorant, narrow conceptions, the conflicts and fears of their feeble, timorous, morbid spiritual life. The selfish law of life is for the strong to be scornful of the weak, to ridicule them, to roughly disregard or brush them aside; or else to put burdens upon them, use and compel them because they are weak, and cannot help themselves. Savage men make weak women do the rough work of life. The Indian smokes his pipe while his heavily laden squaw trudges behind him. Powerful lords make peasants bear heavy burdens. A bully at school will make a timid little fellow fag for him. A rich man will put upon his dependants. A big hulking brother will make a sister wait upon him. A selfish head of a family makes all its members minister to him. A strong-conscienced man will ridicule and wound his weak-conscienced brother. That is the selfish law.

What is the Christian law? “Bear ye one another’s burdens.” Do not cause your brother to offend. Do not make your conscience, or intellect, or will, despotic over his. Be tender, considerate, charitable. Do not be impatient of inferior natures. Bear with them, sympathise with them, help them, nurture them into strength. Do not struggle to have your own way in everything; meet them so far as you can in their way. Deny yourself to help them. Give, do not exact. In this way you will really benefit, not them only, but yourself also.

But the apostle is very guarded in his injunction. I am not simply to please my neighbour, I am to please him for his good. In what I do to please him there

must be a moral end in view. I may please him to his hurt. I may minister merely to his lower appetite—his base passions and lusts. I may please the demon that is in him, not the divinity. The world is full of caterers for man's sensuous pleasures—some for his swinish lusts, some for his frivolous vanities. There are fawners, and flatterers, and parasites of life, who swarm around men who have been successful, men who have climbed to power. How ready the multitude is to shout, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!" Men who have amassed money; what a servile worship they get, irrespective of character! What a hush there is when a millionaire comes into a room! what a bustle to give him the chief seat in the synagogue! Even good, gracious men will sometimes speak of him with a kind of religious awe. How men cringe to him and flatter him, even when they know him to be selfish, and overbearing, and coarse! How they worship Mammon—"the least erected spirit that fell"! Not thus are we to please men—please them to their hurt, feed the selfish vices that are strong enough already, flatter them to their perdition. When men cry, "It is the voice of a god," Herod believes it, and "the angel of God smites him, and he dies."

This is not pleasing a man for his good, or, to use the architectural figure of Paul, for his edification. It is flattering him with lies for selfish interests, pleasing him with a good dinner, with the most comfortable place by the fireside, with the chief seat. It is building up his selfishness, not his spiritual character.

You are to please a man for his good, in order to make him a better man. You may not please his sense so as to lower his moral tone; you may not make him happy at the cost of his moral and spiritual nobility.

It is his good, not your own that you are to seek by pleasing him—which makes all the difference. Your solicitude for his good must be so strong that, instinctively, you shall seek, by pleasing him, to make him a better man.

This makes pleasing men a Christian duty ; angering men a sin. It is part of your religious process in seeking to save men. The love which Christ inspires in His disciples is to be a gracious and constant social influence. It is a great ministry of life—"Ministering grace one to another." You make men happy, and they feel that their happiness comes from the benevolence that Christ has inspired.

What a difference there is in men—even in good men ! Some men irritate you. You know not why or how. There is in them something that finds out and excites whatever is bad in you—your temper, your disparagement, your sarcasm ; they act as irritants ; while other men find out in you whatever is good. You leave them softened, harmonised, gladdened. Men are like magnets ; they excite whatever is most in affinity with themselves. If, therefore, our heart be full of genuine Christian goodness and love, we shall excite these qualities in others. We may not speak a word to them that shall be formally religious, and yet they shall feel elevated, purified, edified.

What a blessed ministry of life it would be were all Christian men and women to attain to this—in the family, in the Church, in the counting-house—if every disciple of Christ made all who came into contact with him better and nobler ! "Helpers of each other's joy," what a great suggestive word it is ! It would be a personal, household, social ministry, far more potent than all the sermons that are preached from pulpits.

What a range it has ! In how many ways we may so please men. What abilities and opportunities for doing so God gives us ! If wherever we went acerbity were smoothed down, and querulousness soothed, and the wrinkles of care rubbed out, and tears turned into smiles, and mourning into dancing ! Do not say that to speak about merely pleasing my neighbour is not preaching the Gospel. It is the very heart and end of the Gospel—"Peace upon earth, goodwill towards men."

If we acted upon this principle, how many things would be made pleasant that are now disagreeable ! How differently we should teach our children—trying to please them in instructing them ! How differently we should rule our households—trying to make every member of them happy ! How differently we should speak to one another—giving a pleasant tone to all unpleasant things ! How effectually scandal would be stopped, and that terrible fidelity of "speaking our mind," in which we delight so much ! How differently we should represent religion in our families, and from our pulpits—"its ways as ways of pleasantness, its paths as paths of peace" ! Is not this one of the root truths, casual as it may seem, out of which practical religion grows ?

What importance attaches to the temper of a man ! How much evil there is in bad tempers ! What edification they hinder ! What damage they do ! Can a Christian man do the work of the devil more effectually than by indulging in bad tempers ? Is it not a prime duty of the Christian life that by amiability, generosity, and gentle, gracious words, we please our neighbour to his edification ?

If then a man acquire power or money, he is not straightway to set about making himself happy only ; he is to make others happy. Rich men are to bear the

burdens of poor men. Wise men are to remedy the mistakes and prejudices of foolish men. Refined people are to be patient with coarse, vulgar people ; which is only saying that "he who is greatest is to be the servant of all."

It is, I say, the greatest ministry of a human life thus to please our neighbour to his edification. How Jesus Christ did this, how His whole life was a ministry and model of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, I must leave you to recall and apply.

GOD'S STORAGE OF GOODNESS.

GOD'S STORAGE OF GOODNESS.

"Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee—which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men."—PSALM XXXI. 19.

WHAT unexpected lights are sometimes thrown upon great problems of theology and of life, by incidental forms of expression in the Bible; not only by its formal statements of great truths, but by the peculiar phrases in which truths are embodied—passing allusions, momentary lights, turns of phrases indicating characteristics that are not formally expressed!

Men, for instance, are anxiously asking—as from the days of Job they have been asking—whether or not God is really good; what are the methods of His goodness? "The burden of the mystery, the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" press heavily upon us. Men sorrow in a thousand ways which we cannot directly connect with sin. And in the actual providence of life, the pious, the unselfish, the tender-hearted seem to suffer the most. So that even with all the lights that Jesus Christ has shed upon the moral benefits of suffering, we are sometimes constrained to cry out against God's providence as Job did, "Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

Philosophers are sometimes almost driven to the old Persian idea, that there are two independent forces in

the universe—good and evil—contending against each other. Even a man like John Stuart Mill says, either God would have made a better world but couldn't, or if He could He didn't care to do so. And in one of his dark moods Carlyle exclaims, "Ah, but He doesn't care." The writers of the Bible had a very different idea about God; they may sometimes think that even a man like Job was a pious hypocrite, and that therefore God punished him; but they never so much as hint that God Himself was not just and good.

What wonderful conceptions of Jehovah inspire these Psalms! Whence did these Jewish hymnodists get their ideas of a Deity of such perfect purity, inflexible righteousness, infinite goodness, untiring beneficence, in all that He does, magnanimous, pitiful, gracious, bountiful? Are they lingering traditions of a primitive revelation, such as are found in the hymns and liturgies of ancient nations like the Egyptians and Assyrians? Even so, how came the tradition to be preserved in Israel, when all other nations had corrupted or forgotten it? Think of the Jews of the time of Moses, David, Isaiah, surrounded by the idolatries of other nations, and prone to fall into them, imagining for themselves a divine ideal of such peerless moral beauty, such boundless beneficence; so that from that time to this it has taken possession of the foremost nations of the earth. It has changed only as we ourselves have discovered more and more of its glory. Even the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" was only a fuller revelation of the God of Abraham and Moses. Let it be admitted that these Old Testament Psalms are older than Plato or Homer, we shall, I think, be compelled to admit that only a supernatural revelation can account for them.

More wonderful still is it, that under a dispensation so imperfect and so stern as Judaism, and amid all the perplexing mysteries of divine government and human experience, religious men could so intelligently, fervently, and largely emphasize the goodness of the Lord. What terms of rapturous recognition and of rapturous endearment are employed in these Psalms—how their authors strain after adequate expressions: “loving-kindness,” “tender mercies,” “the shadow of God’s wing,” “guiding us with His eye,” “opening His hand and satisfying the desire of every living thing,” “comforting us with His rod and staff”!

How came these religious men to conceive of the goodness of God so largely, and so certainly, as practically to rule their lives by the feeling of it? “Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.” “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His goodness.”

It was not because they did not realise the sorrow and the mystery of pain—how Job, and David, and Jeremiah cried out because of it. “Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me.” “Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.” And yet the strong feeling that God is good always triumphs. Neither Job nor David gets any solution of the problem of human suffering; no light is thrown upon its anomalies. God does not tell them why. Reason is baffled. And yet religious faith and feeling triumph; they cannot doubt God’s transcendent goodness. He *is* good, these mysterious sufferings notwithstanding. God’s mill grinds on, and crushes our precious things; but the proofs of His goodness are too palpable to be discredited even by the mystery of pain, and religious feeling and faith vanquish the dark sceptical

mood. "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

This feeling works strongly in this Psalm. It is an outpouring of conflicting thoughts and tumultuous feelings in some deep trouble. Was it when the men of Keilah proved so treacherous? Or when Absalom so unnaturally rebelled? David is in great extremity. Had not his own religious failure been the cause of his troubles? The Psalm does not, like most of his Psalms of trouble, pass directly from darkness to light, from doubt to faith. The strong tide of feeling moves wave-like, it swells into uprisings of confidence, and recedes into troughs of despondency, or else breaks into the aimless spray of distracted helplessness. How true to human experience it all is! Who does not know such perplexed workings of fear and despondency?

It would be interesting to trace the fluctuations. It must suffice to say that the issue is a triumph and a song of religious faith. The Psalmist's confidence becomes bold and passionate, exultant and defiant. As in the seventy-third Psalm, the inspiration is purely a religious one—the intellectual difficulties, the theological problems are not solved. It is purely the working of the trustful religious heart. God *is* good, he will trust and not be afraid.

This particular verse is one of those pearls of luminous and felicitous beauty which great tempests of the soul sometimes throw up. Even amongst these lofty and manifold celebrations of the divine goodness, its spiritual insight, its largeness of recognition, its fine imaginative conceptions are remarkable.

It is the poetic expression of a profound religious philosophy. It conceives of God's goodness, of God's beneficent provision for men, not as a mere benevolent impulse, a good-natured interposition in the moment of exigency, but as a purposed and prepared goodness—goodness “laid up,” foreordained, and calculated, as the appointed order and ministry of human life. So that when the moment of necessity comes, we find it anticipated by a prepared and calculated provision for it. The poetic conception is goodness laid up in treasures as corn is laid up in barns.

The following verses employ metaphors representing God as a pavilion—a prepared rest and comfort when we are weary ; a fortress—a prepared shelter and defence when we are assailed, within which even the strife of tongues shall not reach us.

Is this merely a poetical way of saying that God is good—a beneficent being who, when we go to Him in our need, will help us? I think not. The meaning suggested is much larger and more profound. It implies much more than a mere impulse of God's kindness, viz., a divine nature, of which goodness is an essential quality—goodness so intense and pervading that it inspires all God's purposes and rules all His doings. It is a practical way of saying, “God is love.” So that the divine order of the world is a purposed goodness, a foreordained adjustment for working out the highest possible benefits for us.

It is a remarkable conception of God, full of great practical inspirations. It were a very inferior conception to think of God as simply doing beneficent things, acting from benevolent impulses. The greatness, and depth, and strong assurance of the Psalmist's conception is that nothing that God can do, can be other than good ;

that goodness is so essentially the quality of His nature that all His purposes, all His plans, all His methods are inspired and ruled by it. So that if He call into existence any creature, all provisions made for it must be determined by pure goodness.

Possibly the Psalmist may be thinking only of religious things, of the way in which religious life and satisfactions are wrought by processes of suffering. Still it is a necessary description of all that God does : the entire order of things, the constitution of physical nature, the principles and methods of providential government, the religious relations of men to God—all are alike parts of a universal order of divine goodness.

Evil, in whatever form it exists, is not of God, but against God. God has no evil laid up for men. In the awful prerogative of our moral freedom we can break God's laws ; refuse and defy Him ; and so evil comes. But as God purposed and prepared all things, there was in everything a laid up goodness—a provision for well-being. Of course, good issues come only to good men—men whose thought, and feeling, and action are in harmony with God's order ; men who co-operate with Him in working out His purposes. "All things work together for good to them that love God." To men of wrong hearts and rebellious lives, who oppose God's purposes and defy His laws, evil must ensue. Nothing works so much evil to the wicked as goodness does. But to men who are good, who live in harmony with God's order, only good can come. As a religious assurance this is very precious. I am to conceive of God as pledged to goodness, as constrained to goodness by His very nature. He cannot be unkind or capricious. Whatever the mystery of individual suffering, whatever the appalling doom of evil, I cannot shut my eyes to

the abounding evidence of His beneficence. He cannot be both evil and good; goodness is not His mere impulse, it is His essential nature. I am compelled, then, to judge

“All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.”

For the Psalmist's age, and for the circumstances of his trouble, it is a marvellous thought of God.

Can it be justified by our larger knowledge and experience? We, with our finite thought and limited knowledge, dare not say that we can fully “justify the ways of God to man.” Much in His doing that is mysterious there must necessarily be; “these are but parts of his ways.” “His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out.” But I think we know enough to justify this affirmation.

On a theme so vast and manifold only a few general suggestions are practicable.

If we take merely the physical creation, what an exhaustless field of illustration it opens out to us! Think of the goodness stored up in the properties of material things, as from time to time they are discovered! How marvellously physical things minister to human life—light and darkness, sunshine and shower, flower and fruit, changing seasons—ay, and how powerfully physical conditions affect intellectual power, social affections, religious feelings!

Think of the very structure of the earth, the various properties of its soils, its mineral treasures! “Surely there is a mine for the silver, and a place for the gold, which they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stones. As for the earth underneath, it is turned up as it were by fire; the stones

thereof are the place of sapphires, and it hath dust of gold." "Its seams of coal are prepared for us, its treasures of lead and tin." Think of gravitation, electricity, magnetism, the properties of light and heat, the economy of vital forces; articles of food, medicines, anæsthetics; the myriad practical appliances of science and art; the telescope, the microscope, the steam-engine, the phonograph, photography, spectrum-analysis; the manifold affinities and repulsions of physical properties, and the services of these to human life! What a proud array of achievements for the benefit of man physical science can boast, from the first intuitive experiments of human necessity to the discoveries of Faraday and Darwin. And yet all these physical properties were inherent in nature from its very creation. Science does not add a single quality. It is simply knowledge of them. It simply discovers properties which the benevolent Creator has laid up for the service of His creatures.

And God has yet more light and truth to break forth from His works. The progress of scientific discovery goes on with accelerated speed. Every new discovery only qualifies us to make fresh ones.

No century of the world's history records so many marvellous discoveries as our own. Sixty years ago we travelled at the rate that Nimrod did four thousand years before; now we travel at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Correspondence with the antipodes required months; now a message can be transmitted from London to Melbourne in a few minutes. And augmenting knowledge is enlarging discovery. Coming discoveries cast their shadows before; men of science thrill at their indications. The perturbations of an undiscovered Neptune are felt in every domain of science. And the marvellous thing is that every discovery increases the sum

of human happiness. No single property of nature works evil, save as its uses are perverted. Is not the difference between savagery and civilization, between the hard stunted lives of our painted forefathers and the conveniences and luxuries of our own modern life measured by discoveries of the hidden properties of nature? The discovery of the mariner's compass enables the fearless navigation of distant oceans. The discovery of the properties of steam makes a journey round the world a holiday excursion, and brings the various productions of the world to our home-markets. The invention of printing has facilitated education, diffused knowledge, and multiplied means of religion. By advances of chemical, medical, and surgical science pain is diminished, health is conserved, impaired function is restored, and the years of life are multiplied. Our houses are full of utilities and comforts, contributed by every region of the globe. Our poor are fed by the products of Australia, India, and China. Our commerce has the world for its market. But for the discoveries of science Christian missions, the circulation of the Bible and many religious ministries would be largely impracticable. Indeed, the suggestions are endless. We do not often preach about these things. But ought we not to be religiously thankful for all this laid-up goodness of the benevolent Creator? How the old Hebrew Psalmists would have sung about it!

Now will any one seriously tell me that all these latent properties of things, so wonderful in their harmonies and so uniformly beneficent in their ministry, are merely fortuitous — "a fortuitous concourse of atoms"? He is an audacious philosopher who dares to suggest such a theory, and he makes a huge demand upon my credulity. Surely there would be exceptions

somewhere—some properties that were incongruous or malignant! I say that not only religion, but reason, common sense, and true science are with us when we affirm that these are the treasured-up goodness of an intelligent and loving Creator. Even the stern laws of injury and destruction—the fire that burns, the water that drowns, the sickness that wastes, the tempest that destroys—are essentially beneficent. Were it possible to violate with impunity the great laws of physical nature, the cosmos would become a chaos, life would be an accident, there would be no certainty in human action, existence would be intolerable. Every law of nature that destroys is simply a guardian of the divine order, a preservation of the goodness God has laid up.

And this harmony of physical nature extends to the moral world. True science is always a handmaid of true religion. How uniformly every great discovery in nature has contributed to the strength, the power, the sanctity of the religious life!

To our startled ignorance, or to our unintelligent religiousness, it may for a moment seem otherwise. Galileo is condemned as a heretic because he demonstrates that the earth goes round the sun; the discoveries of geology are held to discredit the Bible. What really is discredited is some mistaken assumption of ignorant theology. Truth is not always maintained by true reasons. There are many "orthodox liars for God." One of the greatest services which science can render to revelation is to point out its ignorant assumptions, to invalidate its false arguments, to disengage it from its swaddling clothes. Nothing is so injurious to truth as illicit arguments in its defence. Mary wails because they have taken away her Lord. Had not the familiar form of a Jesus of Bethany lain in the grave she could never

have seen Him in the glory of His resurrection life. So we are terrified when old forms of belief are discredited. But if we are to attain to higher, to more spiritual faith, these must perish; "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." There is nothing that revealed religion has so much to fear as error, and no errors so much as those of her own ignorant defenders. The ignorant beliefs of weak men are more mischievous than the vehement denials of strong disbelievers. Let us have faith in God, and faith in the ministry of science. Hitherto every new discovery has only revealed more fully and gloriously the beneficence of the Creator.

I scarcely dare venture upon a more particular illustration. But as an instance: suppose that science should conclusively demonstrate the theory of physical evolution; that the physical organism of man is, through a long season of gradations, developed from a protoplasm. This is not, I think, conclusively demonstrated yet. There may be strong probabilities of it, but as yet it is only a hypothesis. And, of course, it does not involve the idea of rational, moral, or religious development. For these, I think, we must assume special interpositions and fresh endowments of the Creator.

But suppose it demonstrated of physical man. What follows? Not that the Creator is discredited. The speculation leaves the question of origin exactly where it finds it. But, if in this primitive protoplasm, so elementary that no microscope can resolve it, all the diversified life of the wonderful world lies undeveloped, has not science put upon the Creator a new crown of glory? Are not such previsions of divine wisdom, such processes of divine power, such laid-up stores of divine goodness, far more wonderful than our ordinary conceptions of creation?

I stand absolutely confounded before the marvels of power, and wisdom, and goodness contained in this amazing protoplasm. Every provision for the life, the functions, the order, the well-being, of the entire universe embodied in that marvellous germ of matter, and destined to unfold in unerring precision, and in inviolable sequence into all the diversified life of this marvellous world! "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, I cannot attain to it." Whatever truth there may be in the theory, it does suggest an inexhaustible storage of creating goodness.

Another series of illustrations may be derived from the providence of human life—the plans and processes by which the great ends of human life are accomplished. May we not here again recognise a storage of goodness laid up?

Detailed demonstration is impracticable. The vastness of the field, the character of the phenomena, and the intricacy of the developments, preclude everything but the barest suggestion. It is, however, important to grasp the great idea—God purposing gracious and glorious ends in the creation of man, and developing them by the long and intricate processes of human history.

Take the history of the race: the rise, progress, and ministry of each separate community and nation; and then the confluence of national movements, bringing about the beneficent end.

Some of you may be acquainted with the fine demonstration of this in "Lessing's Education of the Human Race." Can we resist the conclusion that human history has been, not a fortuitous concourse of impulses, but the development of an intelligent purpose and plan? Look at it at any one given moment. The play of forces

is as tumultuous and confusing as the motions of complex machinery to an ignorant observer. But the issue proves that—

“Through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.”

Nations are developed, not by resistless acts of autocratic power, but by inspirations and exercises of their own thoughts and faculties; through circumstances with which they have to deal, difficulties of nature which they have to overcome. The ground must be cultured for the production of food, the properties of things must be discovered and utilized, changing conditions of social and civic life must be made to help in higher developments. Thus, through mistakes and crimes, through epidemics of disease, through wicked wars and social wrongs, as well as through direct teachings of right, the world has made progress. Perhaps our most salutary and abiding lessons are taught by our failures.

On the other hand, how we are stimulated by successes; calmed, strengthened, and sweetened by the peaceful enjoyment of health and affluence and tender relationships! How hope is inspired by achievement, and we grow wiser and more sympathetic and gracious! “God’s gentleness makes us great.” The most obvious instance is God’s training of the Jewish people through the conflicting play of divine purposes, human passions, and diversified experiences. Sometimes they are subdued to implicit obedience, at other times so full of mad passion that it is difficult to believe that they recognised a God at all. In what a marvellous and manifold way God led the seed of the Syrian Jacob; developed the horde of Egyptian slaves; disciplined the wayward Bedouins of the wilderness into a well-ordered nation; educating them by exposure to hardship and peril, by necessitating

invigorating struggle and ingenious experiment; developing religious idea and character by gradual revelations of Himself, and by the teachings of experience; speaking to them by divers portions and in divers manners, until, intellectually and religiously, they were fitted for the revelation of the Son!

So I think we might trace the educational history of the nations of antiquity, of our own English race, of Continental peoples, of the United States. As with individuals, so with nations, God "girds them, though they do not know Him." Men are ever being educated to a higher character, qualified for a greater good. And this is seen as much in the decay of the kingdom or nation that will not serve Him, as in the growth and blessing of the nations that do.

The process is to be completed in the universal kingdom of God among the nations; when "all shall know Him, from the least even unto the greatest," when we shall realize the "days of Heaven upon earth"—the redeemed world which has ever been the millennial hope of men, and which every prophecy, whether of divine declaration or of men's imagination, so glowingly depicts.

What a conception of laid-up goodness it is! Not in the meagre sense of a warehoused store, or a doled-out supply, but in the grander sense of a vital development, a calculated series of moral issues, a good wrought out through our own enlarging thought and maturing righteousness. That in this sense the Messiah was a laid-up goodness we are expressly told. In the progressive stages of Jewish history, and in the unconscious education of Gentile nations, God was preparing men for Christ. He is credulous, indeed, who can read the Old Testament record of the Jews, and the general history of the nations, and conclude that this marvellous develop-

ment of the world is a blind concurrence of chance influences.

So in the providence of individual life. All the perplexities of personal experience notwithstanding, may we not see purpose, plan, and goodness in each individual history? Is there not for every individual life a stored-up goodness, to be realized as we grow to a qualification for realizing it by our living and working in harmony with God's great laws?

Of course, if a man will be wilful, selfish, or wicked, regardless of physical, social, moral, or religious law, violating the divine order of things, these cannot work out for him good issues. "If a man take fire to his bosom he must be burned. If he touch pitch he must be defiled." "He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him." God Himself cannot make wrongdoing come right. Law must work out its natural issues. "Whatsoever a man soweth that must he also reap." God's good laws and processes work good only to those who conform to them.

He is blind, indeed, who can read no lesson of divine purpose and goodness in his own experience of life. How often things, in themselves painful and seemingly adverse, work out the highest good! The severest experiences develop the noblest character. We "labour to enter into rest." "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." In the genealogy of hope, tribulation is its ancestral stock. The mysteries and struggles of life have been the conditions of our largest faith, our most enduring patience, our conquering strength, our noblest sympathies, our most ineffable rest.

Then there is the Bible—a marvellous storehouse

of laid-up goodness ; from beginning to end an orderly plan, a continuous development of gracious purpose, yearning love, unwearying mercy, and glorious salvation.

The Bible is not a uniform book of mere theological dogmas and moral teachings. It is the historic record of God's gradual revelation of Himself, and of the way in which that revelation has been received. God spake to the fathers by divers portions. Think of all that lies between the first promise and the advent of Jesus Christ. How gradual the unfolding of the divine idea of salvation, the realization by men of the amazing purpose of infinite pity and self-sacrificing love—a laid-up goodness from the beginning ! "The Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world." Abraham "saw Christ's day," Moses "spake concerning Him." The Levitical economy was an elaborate and manifold type of Him. "The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy."

But again, it is a goodness to be realized only by the developing fitness of men themselves ; each stage of the progressive revelation marvellously adapted to the capacity of those receiving it, and preparing them for a still fuller revelation. So that the Bible is also a record of the spiritual progress of our race, of a long education of men in ideas of salvation, in the possibilities of divine goodness, in the spirituality of religious life.

Account for it as you may, what a marvellous characteristic of the Bible this is—that sixty-six different pamphlets, written by some forty or fifty different authors, living through the course of fourteen centuries, and writing in almost every form of literature, should yet be fundamentally one organic whole—uniform in idea, continuous in purpose, orderly in development ! Men, again—Adam, Abraham, Moses,

David, Isaiah, Paul, John—living individual lives, in most diversified circumstances, and yet each a palpable link in the chain of divine purpose, consciously or unconsciously all contributing to the sublime development. "They without us," says one of the latest concerning his predecessors, "are not made perfect." Is there anything parallel to it in history, in literature, or in religion? An entire national life and history wrought into the development! It is the most insoluble of the problems of the world's history, if, that is, you refuse to regard it as a divine preparation for Christianity. Never was there a national constitution so inexplicable, a religious ritual so unmeaning, a national delusion so infatuated.

What a demonstration of God's laid-up goodness might be wrought out on these lines! What amazing and far-seeing previsions! God adjusting and subordinating His manifestations and doings to the working out of a spiritual redemption of men from sin, until, in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, the "mystery hid from ages and generations" is fully and gloriously revealed.

Or, turning from this general purpose and structure of the Bible, we might take its separate religious teachings—the religious expressions with which it is inlaid; its declarations of God's character; its assurances and promises incidentally addressed to individual men. How meanings break out from them that, at first, were never suspected! How marvellously they meet the necessities and feelings of our own religious life! What assurances of God's love and sympathy with men! What tender helpful solicitude for all who struggle and suffer, in psalm, in prophecy, in biographical instance! What a treasury of manifold reli-

gious teaching and assurance the Bible is! What ineffable expressions of exquisite tenderness and un-failing goodness it contains!

How we men and women of this modern England turn to the records of Abraham's faith, of David's passionate, fluctuating piety, and of God's yearning love, His wise, helping, and patient goodness to them!—especially the delicacy of His sympathy and help; as considerate and generous and tender as it is affluent; always respecting our manhood, always inspiring what is most unselfish and noblest in our gratitude, so that the sacred writers have to coin words, such as "loving-kindness" and "tender mercies," combining and augmenting in their compound character all ordinary ideas of goodness. The very treasury of similitude and suggestion is exhausted. They create a new vocabulary for love itself. We have here a treasury of records and demonstrations of goodness prepared thirty centuries ago, and yet yielding sufficient and supreme teaching and strengthening for the troubled spiritual life of to-day. Who can estimate what, as a storehouse of laid-up goodness, this Bible is to myriads of living men; the deep places of consciousness, the subtle needs, the complex circumstances in which it finds us, and the light and peace and strength which it gives? What a spell is wrought upon agonized souls by its quiet words! A promise to some old saint, a passing phrase, a chance epithet, an incidental suggestion, is as a cool hand upon a fevered brow, as a mother's bosom to a terrified child, as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." In times of darkness, sorrow, and struggle, in lonely places, on sick beds, by open graves, its teachings have wrought as a charm, entering like light, comforting like love. Through them we "look

to God and are lightened, and our faces are not ashamed."

In this practical sufficiency for human need the Bible stands alone. By I know not what inspirations of God it "comes home to our business and bosoms," finds us in the secret places of our soul, stills our wildest agonies, and satisfies even our imaginations. "We who have believed do enter into rest."

And the Bible, like physical nature, is ever yielding us more and more. As our spiritual life develops we are qualified to discern more. The Bible is most to those who are purest in spiritual sympathies, and loftiest in spiritual imaginations. Since its volume was sealed, it might always have been said, as it may be said still, "God has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." How incompetent our poor theological science to exhaust this treasury of spiritual life—God's life and ours!

What a progress of spiritual revelation and of religious attainment the history of the Bible has worked! Who may compare the spiritual understanding, the religious realizations of the first Christian century with those of the nineteenth? Or even those of our own immediate forefathers with our own? Just as the understanding of physical nature increases with advancing science, so the understanding of the Bible grows with the spiritual life of the generations. What misconceptions have been rectified, what superstitions have been dispelled, what misinterpretations have been corrected, what unworthy doctrines have been abandoned! How history, science, and better-qualified criticism have rectified mistakes and discovered meanings; and in no generation so largely as in our own! Above all, a more developed spiritual life has conferred a more luminous vision, a deeper insight, a

more sympathetic intuition, a broader domain for thought and life.

The timid elders of each generation look with dismay upon the distance which thought has travelled since their first theological lessons. They think that the constellations of the heavens have changed. Nay, but it is only the swift, unconscious movement of their own little world, whereby their standpoint is changed. They are terrified for the theology of the Bible, because its present aspects and relations seem different from those of their own college systems. So Mary lamented over the empty sepulchre. She did not suspect that her dead Lord was with her in a nobler, more spiritual resurrection life. New births of thought are always travails. We never cast off a worn-out creed without a feeling of desolation. Think only of our growing recognition of God's fatherhood — of the stern, hard, dishonouring conceptions that have been discredited by the spiritual, luminous, and loving aspects in which He is now conceived. Every generation must climb to loftier heights, must be shone upon by purer lights, must survey a wider domain. We see farther than our fathers, because we stand upon their shoulders.

Like mines of silver in the earth, the precious things of God are treasured in the Bible. We are wiser than our fathers because of their experiments and discoveries. The demonstration is ever augmenting that the Bible is a treasury of goodness which no demands of men's spiritual life can exhaust. It is more largely disclosed and more variously tested by our greater understanding and more spiritual demand. We see in the Bible more than our fathers saw; just as Faraday saw in nature more than Newton did; not because he was greater than Newton, but because he lived after him. And our

children will have loftier apprehensions still. Knowledge "grows from more to more." The Bible can never be exhausted; we never find it morally false or spiritually inadequate. At whatever stage of its revelation we test it, its revelations are found in adequate measure, and in a true order and harmony. It is a book of life; and, as with all life, it is most to him who brings the highest life to its interpretation. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever."

In many and marvellous ways, therefore, this grand conception of God is true; and the recognition is a manifold and amazing inspiration. It is a sentiment that affects the entire feeling, endeavour, and experience of our religious life. For all true and godly men, for all who live according to the divine order, God has laid up goodness—physical, social, and religious.

I must content myself with these suggestions, although even the text suggests a condition of positive proof. The laid-up goodness is "wrought for those that put their trust in Thee before the sons of men." If a man come into harmony with God's laws, into sympathy with God's purposes, his own experience will exemplify the assertion of laid-up goodness. It is the demonstration of religious history. Goodness is realized in the working out of a thousand complex processes.

What a doctrine of God it is! What a light and strength of life! A firm and sympathetic grasp of this idea is in itself a religion. The greatest of beings—He "with whom we have to do"—is the best and the most loving; a God of essential goodness, demonstrated to be such by every test that can be applied to His works. The harmony of this vast and varied testimony is wonderful.

Is it not strange that in so many different domains of research and experience no exception should be

found? Every new discovery is of a new provision of goodness. Who could manipulate the testimony of a universe? Who could have imagined it? It can be rationally accounted for only by a divine origin and order.

With what a grateful feeling the recognition should fill our affections and inspire our life! God is our trust, our rest, our hope. "This God is our God for ever and ever, and He will be our guide even unto death."

CHRIST'S DESIRE FOR HIS LAST PASSOVER.

CHRIST'S DESIRE FOR HIS LAST PASSOVER.

"And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

LUKE XXII. 14—16.

LUKE alone has preserved for us this saying of our Lord. It is deeply, touchingly human. His human tenderness is as great as His divine purpose. Whenever, as here, He permits us to look into His heart, we see it full of human feeling; the perfect sympathy, the tender desire, the manly sorrow—all that can mark a man, and constrain love and worship are there. Both in His joys and in His sorrows, how utterly removed He is from stoical feeling! When He rejoices, it is with a pure human joy and in human things. When He sorrows, He is troubled and prayerful, and evinces the struggle in which human shrinking from pain is schooled into obedience and patience. What glimpses into His great human heart these last few days afford! How tender these last parting hours of fellowship with "His own"! What a magnanimous suppression of His own sorrow! What a deep pathos of self-sacrifice! What a grandeur of divine pity for His murderers! What a beauty of filial solicitude about His mother! All human feelings were strong in Him, and He permits us to see their strength; for above

all things He is a proper man, "Himself taking part of the same."

He very acutely felt His separation from His disciples ; and for His own sake as well as for theirs. In many ways He tries to comfort both them and Himself. It was "expedient for them that He should go away" ; and yet how He lingers over these parting hours ! How He clings to life and fellowship with them, reluctant to say "farewell" !

"With desire I have desired to eat this Passover *with you* before I suffer." The suffering was so certain and so near that He assumes it. He was drawn to it as by a spell—the spell of His great saving purpose. But the clinging human love is also there, and He permits us to see how strong and tender it is. He speaks as a dying friend, or brother, or father would speak. How near to us all this brings the Christ ! Momentous things were to be said and done at this Passover. Its record, therefore, is fully detailed—His great lesson of brotherly service ; the unmasking of the traitor ; the institution of His own new Covenant Feast, to "show forth His death until He come" ; the last and greatest of His discourses ; the solemn farewell to His own ; His great intercessory prayer. Henceforth they would no more "know Christ after the flesh."

He parted from them at a feast, as at a feast He had "first showed forth His glory." The social fellowship was to realise the deepest spiritual feelings, the most tender and loving of all the sympathies that bind Him to us. It was the solemn consecration of the memorial of His death. I think we may understand the eager intensity of His feeling : "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." It is the eve of a great separation, of a great suffering, of a great accom-

plishment. It is the last meal of parting friends. It is a farewell more solemn than that of distance, more mystic than that of a deathbed. It draws out more tenderness and love, therefore, than any other parting could. Why this intense desire?

With what a strange intensity He desired the completion of His work! "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." He foresaw it from the first, clearly and strongly He anticipated His cross. It was not a fate that overtook Him, it was a mission that He had to accomplish. It was not a forecast of possible consequences of His work, it was an essential part of the work itself. And His feeling is a strange blending of fear and determination, a gradual deepening of solemnity and intensity. "He stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem," His love at every step triumphing over His shrinking. He longed to complete the great sacrifice which was to redeem the world. The Passover, especially, was the culmination of all that had typified Him. It had been a kind of approximation towards Him. It was the full symbol of the atoning sacrifice—the lamb on the altar, the sprinkled blood on the door-posts. Each Passover would have to Him a mournful significance, and this last would fulfil all. He Himself would become the Paschal lamb. What emphasis it puts upon His love, that He had a clear foresight that He had to suffer. His human foreknowledge had its limitations. Possibly He did not anticipate all that He had to endure, all the experience of His agony. Its unknown possibilities might be part of His fear. But He did know that He had to die, to drink the cup of trembling; and through life He intelligently advanced to His goal. "For their sakes He sanctified Himself," consecrated

Himself to whatever had to be done or endured. His whole life was a process and a preparation for His great death, and He estimated everything in relation to it. Disregarding the amazement, the remonstrance of His disciples, "He stedfastly set His face," literally, "hardened His face to go up to Jerusalem"; and when all was accomplished, and every preparation for His death was made, He knelt down and prayed, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee." His death would save men, and He advanced towards it with a strange fascination of love and self-sacrifice. He did not hasten, but He did not delay.

The fellowship of the Passover would be a comfort and strength to His own heart.

It was the mysterious significance of the Passover that the death of a victim was celebrated in a feast, that the death was celebrated with rejoicing. The natural moods of men in the presence of death were transformed. Worship by the sacrifice of an innocent victim is surely the strangest of all ways of approaching God, so strange that natural instincts seem insufficient to account for it.

Could Christ, then, enter into the joyous feeling of the feast, when He Himself was to be the victim? When He stood on the verge of His great agony, and the shadow of the cross fell upon Him, could He sing the rejoicing psalms of the great Hallel—the 113th and five following psalms—appointed for the feast? Not only are they Messianic psalms, prophetic of the great sacrifice that is to be bound upon the altar, they are psalms of rejoicing and triumph. And this was the hymn that He sang before He went to the Mount of Olives.

Do not sorrowful souls find comfort in singing great hymns of faith? He did not think or say that it was no time for Him to sing hallelujahs. He was about to suffer the most awful of human experiences; it was the hour and the power of darkness, when "the Lord would lay upon Him the iniquity of us all"; when His "soul would be exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart;"—and here it is the heavy heart itself that sings.

To put it on the lowest ground, our Lord would not evade a religious duty. No thought of self or of sorrow was permitted as an excuse. He would sing His Passover psalms as devoutly as when, at twelve years of age, He first came up to the feast; even though the song was no part of the divine ritual of the feast, but only a human instinct and tradition. How often we think sorrow a justification for absence from religious worship, for the silencing of song! But He really desired it for comfort. There is no such incongruity as we imagine between sorrow and song. Plaint and prayer are not our only, or even our best, means of coming to God. There is inspiration and soothing in a song of praise, in faith urging itself to great trust. The fervent utterance of great words of confidence of itself begets confidence. We may not wait for feeling before we sing; the song will inspire the feeling. It is enough that we yearn for the faith. I may not wait until I have no fear before I say, "Therefore I will not fear." I am not to wait until I attain the utmost religious ardour before I say, "My soul thirsteth for Thee, it followeth hard after Thee." I am not, because my heart is cold, to turn away from the Lord's table until it becomes fervent. When I "do this in remembrance of Him," love is

enkindled. The ominous thing would be to take a cold heart away. By uttering words of praise I generate the heart of praise.

Our Lord, therefore, would strengthen the heart of His human confidence by the observance of this Passover with His disciples ; as it would also strengthen theirs. We may not lose the sense of mercy in the sense of sorrow. Rather let us force the recognition by taking into our mouth its song : " In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to make known our requests unto God." Praise is a better resource in trouble than even prayer. It were the most sorrowful of all our sorrows were our heart of praise dead within us ; did " God our Maker give us no songs in the night." In going to His Passion Christ sings at a festal celebration. And this would soothe His human spirit, confirm His self-sacrificing purpose, and prepare Himself for His great endurance.

And the human fellowship and sympathy would comfort Him. How this feeling comes out every now and then : " Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation " ; " Tarry ye here and watch with Me " ; " This do in remembrance of Me." The Lord's Supper, therefore, is not so much an institution of worship as it is a token of remembrance. It is not so much a divine command as it is a human entreaty. Not for our sakes only would He have us remember Him ; it is the craving of His own heart of love. It gratifies Him to be remembered. He institutes the Supper as parting friends give keepsakes. It is not worship that He institutes, it is fellowship, sympathy that He craves ; fellowship before He suffers, fellowship after He has suffered. Not with His Father only does He commune, but with His disciples also. In these solemn parting hours their

common love is to find its purest expression. He calls them "not servants, but friends." He pours out upon them His full heart of love, and solaces Himself by theirs; speaks to them in words more spiritual, near, and tender than He had ever employed before; reveals to them His great purposes; unbare the secret of His heart, and realises the fidelity of theirs. He comforts Himself by comforting them. They were gathered round Him as men gather round death-beds, and He speaks in tender counsel, and assurance, and benediction; commends them by His last prayers; bequeaths to them His last legacy. It was His last quiet hour. Before daybreak the band of the traitor will come; then the clamorous crowd will gather round Him, the trial will harass Him, His death agonies will disable Him. They knew that He was about to die, and "sorrow filled their hearts." In a few hours He would be with the Father, and He would carry with Him their last thoughts and words of love. It was, on their part, the surrender of their Lord, the overturn of all they had hoped. How these last words would abide in their memories and hearts, long as they might live! Who could ever forget them? How often would they work as a spell, keeping them from sin and from despair! The foreshadowings of bereavement then, how soon they would be transformed into the foregleams of immortal life, which they have been to men ever since! They are the chief lights of Christ in the dark ways of our life. Christ knows what our life is, and these are His guides and comforts for all who shall believe on Him through the word of these disciples.

I think, too, He would have desire towards the new institution which was specially to be His memorial.

When He had partaken of this Passover it was to be

abrogated for ever ; its dispensation was ended. When the disciples sat down to the Passover, they were Jews observing a Jewish festival ; when they rose up, they were Christians who had observed the first Supper of the Lord. The august dispensation of Moses was now disannulled ; that which it prefigured had come. In that quiet upper room, surrounded by these poor fishermen, Judaism ended, Christianity was born. The Passover was the first Jewish thing that Christ disannulled, and it was the symbol and essence of the whole. God had "provided Himself a Lamb" ; "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" ; the prefiguring type for ever disappears, the historic commemoration is instituted "until He come." He marked its importance by giving the last precious hours of His life to its institution. Dying men do not enjoin trifles. The latest of His acts, it was one of the most precious.

It is the memorial He has left us : "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death," realise the fellowship thus tenderly inaugurated—the fellowship of His death. "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." In a thousand ways of life He fulfils His promise, perhaps never so fully and so tenderly as at the Lord's table. It is fellowship with "His own"—the fellowship of their most grateful memories and tender affections, when their thought and heart gather round the central fact of His death—His supremest proof of love. How He renews all the pledges of His love, and makes us realise all its privileges ! Who can turn from this table un-comforted ? Who can fail of the inspiration of having communed with the Saviour ?

There is, I think, deep meaning and comfort in the wish of the dying to partake of the Lord's Supper, if

it be spiritually discerned. Who would not wish to pass from such communion of earth to His presence in Heaven? If, when about to die, Christ found comfort in observing His last Passover, so we may find comfort in the last communion of His table. It was the solemn constitution of the New Covenant, which to-morrow should be sealed with His blood.

And He would look forward to the last consummation of all—"Ye do show forth the Lord's death until He come"; "I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God"; "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come." It was His anticipation of the high celebration of the heavenly world, the feast that He will hold with His own in the kingdom of the Father. This was His last earthly Passover, but there would be a new Paschal celebration—"the marriage supper of the Lamb," when all should "be fulfilled," when the kingdom now planted as a grain of mustard-seed should be consummated in its glorious fulness and fruitfulness. He takes for granted its continuity. He does not doubt its issue. They would "show forth His death until He come." He would "be with them alway, even unto the end of the world." That little company in the upper room was to multiply into a multitude that no man could number, and to be gathered into a fellowship that was inviolable and eternal.

His desires were for this. His bodily absence was to be succeeded by His spiritual presence: "I will come to you"; "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

In this memorial of His death He communes with us still; and it points forward to our being with Him, to the blessedness of being called to the marriage

supper of the Lamb. And with this glance into the heavenly future He comforts Himself—"He sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied."

Is not all this conclusive as to the character of the Lord's Supper—that it is a fellowship, not a sacrifice, not a worship, save as all our love is worship?

Should it not make the Lord's Supper very precious to us? It is the satisfaction of His last social desire, the comfort of His last earthly fellowship. If He, the divine Lord, so desired the fellowship of these poor men, how should we desire His—we who have so much need of His fulness, His love, and His strengthening, so many sins to be forgiven, and sinful feelings to be overcome, and sorrows to be soothed, and cold hearts to be enkindled? Shall He desire it, and we in careless and causeless indifference stay away? Even in His exalted blessedness He would have us remember Him. He seeks our fellowship at this feast. With what glowing thoughts and eager yearnings should we turn towards it! With what special emphasis and faith should we repeat the great words, "Until He come"! The great hope of His coming should inflame our desire and urge our prayer. It is His great promise—"Surely I come quickly." It should be our answering prayer—"Even so come, Lord Jesus."

THE BIBLE AS A REVELATION OF GOD.

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“God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son.”—HEBREWS I. 1.

THIS is the judgment of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews concerning the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It does not matter much who the writer was—Paul, as some have thought, or Apollos, as others contend, or some other early Christian disciple whose name has not come down to us. The judgment is substantially that of all the New Testament writers, and above all, of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who rebuked the Jews for not receiving Him, although their Scriptures testified of Him. So, on the way to Emmaus, He expounded to the disciples the predictions of Moses and the prophets concerning Himself; and He calls them “slow of heart to believe,” because they did not see that in Him these old prophecies had their fulfilment. Whatever authority, therefore, may pertain to the intellectual greatness and spiritual insight of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of His Apostle Paul, even to claim for them no other qualifications as witnesses, is arrayed on the side of those claims for the Bible that Christian men affirm still.

Two things are affirmed by this particular writer. First, that God spake to the Jewish nation by the

prophets of the Old Testament, evidently in an especial and supernatural manner ; and next, that He spake to them by a gradual revelation or teaching, communicated to them in diversified ways.

This is the claim we make for the Bible. And it certainly is an immense support of it, that this was the claim not only of the Jews themselves, but of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the revealer of God in a far higher sense.

Can this claim be sustained ? Can it be so supported by historic and by moral evidence as to justify reasonable men in admitting it ? Of course, we assume that God is the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth. Our present question is, Has this great and supreme Being revealed Himself to the creatures that He has made ?

The claim of the Bible is that it does reveal to men the personality, the characteristics, and the purposes of God.

That it is possible for God so to reveal Himself to the moral beings whom He has made, can scarcely be questioned, unless His own real being, personality, and spiritual qualities be denied. Admit our great idea of God, you must admit that He can reveal Himself to men ; who have, in their own nature, qualities and powers for receiving such a revelation.

God has revealed much of Himself, even in the physical creation ; the work manifests the workman. Every recognition of our senses, every discovery of science, every act of reasoning on the part of the natural philosopher proves that the Being who made the heavens and the earth, is powerful and wise and benevolent. Physical properties of things for use and for beauty ; natural law and order ; the provisions and processes of nature, attest the truth of the Psalmist's affirmation

that "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," and of Paul's great saying, that they show "His eternal power and God-head." With this complicate and beneficent universe before me, Atheism, mere physical self-evolution, is to me absolutely unthinkable.

If, then, it be admitted that God is the Creator of the moral being that we call man, can it even be imagined that God would not in some way manifest Himself, so as to establish communication with him? The physical creation cannot speak to man's spiritual and religious nature; it cannot reveal the spiritual and religious character of God—what God's moral qualities are, what He thinks about man, about his religious character and destiny, what He would have man be or do. If all that man can know about God is what the physical universe reveals, then he is ignorant of what is greatest in God, and cannot exercise towards God the high spiritual and religious qualities of his own nature. The moral and spiritual God and moral and spiritual man cannot in any way come together.

Now, conceding that God is God, I cannot even imagine this; I cannot think of God as a selfish, moody omnipotence making man and sending him forth on his career, and having no further communication with him. He must in some way make known to His moral creature how he is to live, what character he is to bear. Made in His likeness, a being of religious nature and possibility, it is monstrous to suppose that He will have no kind of fellowship with man, nothing to do with his character and destiny.

And then, as man has become a creature of sorrow and sin, and is full of spiritual needs and cravings, the thought is impossible that the God whom we conceive

will turn away from him without pity or help or care. Every probability is that God will reveal Himself in some helping way to a moral being like man—God's moral nature and man's moral nature being alike—God the Father, man the child. Man is not a mere created thing, but a living soul, God's very breath, an emanation of His life and nature. The question, then, is simply one of fact—Has He done this?

Suppose that He purposed to do so—purposed to make known to men what His own moral character is; what His moral purposes are; what He wishes His moral creature man to be and do; what He thinks and feels and purposes concerning man as he actually is. In what manner or manners could this revelation be actually made?

First, God might directly and personally speak to individual men; appear to them in visions; instruct them in dreams; utter to them audible words. And He might commission the individual men whom He thus addressed to carry the message to their fellow-men. But then the question would present itself, How would men know that the prophet was really sent of God? When Noah, or Abraham, or Moses said to the people, "God has sent me to you with a revelation of Himself, of His purposes, of His will," it was essential that some credentials should be adduced. The character of the message itself would be some measure of proof; but if people were unspiritual, besotted, and hardened by sinful habit and feeling, this kind of moral or spiritual proof would not be fully appreciated. It requires a cultured spiritual soul to recognise the full force of moral proof.

Miracles are, therefore, the natural and reasonable credentials of a man professing to be an ambassador

from God, and to be charged with a divine message. And by a miracle I mean here only such a mighty work as it was palpably impossible the man himself could have wrought without supernatural aid. "We know that Thou art a teacher sent from God; for no man can do the miracles that Thou doest except God be with him." Thus Moses wrought miracles to convince Pharaoh that God had sent him. Instead of miracles being a stumbling-block, the real difficulty would be, if a man like Moses, professing himself sent by God on such a mission, had been unable to work a miracle in attestation of it. One might have been excused for doubting him. If you look at the Bible economy of miracles, you will find that they are not scattered indiscriminately. Even God's prophets are not represented as working miracles whenever it pleased them. The miracles come at great epochs, when, as with Moses, or Elijah, or Jesus Christ, new and special revelations from God are brought. I scarcely know a more subtle and convincing line of evidence than that which might be constructed out of the Bible record of miracles. Miracles are never wantonly performed; they are always the credentials of the message. I need not tell you that the religious history of the Bible affirms that in this way God did, in the early ages of the world, reveal Himself to men—to Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Whether the record be true or not, it is profoundly natural in its development of things.

Next, God might reveal Himself to men through writings—written descriptions and statements; for writing is simply the record, in well-understood characters, of spoken words, or of mental ideas, or of accomplished facts. Much shallow scorn has been poured upon the idea of "a book revelation of God"—the

divine character described, the divine will made known in a book. Is there any other means of recording facts, of describing character, of expressing purpose and will, thought and feeling, so natural and so adequate? In every other department of human life—in science, philosophy, history, imagination, legislation—the fullest and surest record is a book. Must it not also be so in theology—true ideas about God; in religion—the true life of a man? What is there incongruous or exceptional in the revelation of God's character and purposes in a book? So far, again, all is natural.

But if God is to reveal Himself in a book, individual men must be qualified to write it. It is conceivable that God might, in some signal way, have delivered from Heaven a written revelation; although the supposition is somewhat grotesque, and open to many conclusive objections as to localisation and proof. For manifold reasons, the agency of man was essential.

First, the man must be qualified. He cannot originate, he cannot imagine the true idea of God. The gods that man make are made after man's image. If man is to declare the true God, to teach his fellow men the ideas and purposes of the infinite, these must be supernaturally imparted to him. God must make known His will to His prophet. This, strictly speaking, is what is called revelation. Then, the prophet must be qualified to record the revelation, so as not to misrepresent it. This is what is meant by inspiration. He receives from God a revelation, he records it by inspiration. Obviously, both are essential. If either fail, men will not be taught concerning God.

Here, then, a whole cluster of questions spring up. How does God communicate His ideas to the prophet? How does God inspire the prophet to record them?

Instead of simply accepting the fact, when properly attested, human theories are imagined and insisted upon. Some theologians insist that the inspiration must be a verbal one; that the very words which the writer records must be dictated, lest a shade of meaning should be lost or altered. And when the actual characteristics of the Bible are pointed out as incompatible with this theory—discrepancies of circumstance, of fact, or of figure; or human characteristics of style and conception, of culture, or school—they are denied or ignored, and the theory is reaffirmed with added emphasis. What Coleridge calls a divine ventriloquism—simulated voices—is attributed to the inspiring Spirit, even to the extent of affecting human diversities and errors. Surely the most derogatory idea ever brought to the interpretation of divine phenomena!

Do not candour and reverence compel us to accept as genuine whatever are the actual characteristics of the Bible? Whatever is in the book of divine or of human characteristic is real, not simulated. If the facts will not fit the theory, the theory must be abandoned, not the facts manipulated to suit it, or the eyes shut against them.

Are we competent to form any theory of divine communication or inspiration? Is there any other divine communication or impulse that can be defined? God quickens life in me; have I any theory of life? God awakens in me consciousness, reason; God endows me with genius, as of the poet, the musician, the philosopher; have I any theory of these endowments? Could Shakespeare have explained how he was intellectually endowed with great thoughts, or how he was inspired to express his great thoughts in noble words? I cannot tell even how the fruit-bearing tree is endowed with

vitality, or how its fruit ripens. I cannot tell how my soul and body are united, how reason depends upon my physical frame, how moral feeling is connected with sense. If the Son of God is incarnate, I cannot explain how the divine and the human can be conjoined in Him. If the Holy Spirit quickens religious life in me, I cannot demonstrate the methods of His quickening. If I kneel down to pray, I cannot tell how much of my prayer is of my own human feeling, how much is the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. I cannot explain any impartation of divine life and energy: the philosopher cannot do it in physical or mental science; the theologian cannot do it in spiritual science. Spiritual things cannot be analyzed or formulated, they are simple forces of life. Like the wind, we cannot tell whence they come and whither they go.

Let it be admitted that the Bible is a supernatural revelation from God; then it is as much an incarnation of the Divine Spirit as the Emmanuel was of the Divine Son, as the physical creation was of the Divine Father. If a theory of the inspiration of the Bible could be formulated, it would be an exception to every manifestation of God in the physical and in the moral world.

It is one thing to understand the proof of a fact, it is another to recognise the fact that is proven. I can recognise the proofs that establish the facts that I am a living being, that the corn ripens, that the tides ebb and flow, that the needle points to the north, that an earthquake occurred yesterday; but I cannot understand what life, and tidal influence, and magnetism, and electricity are.

So I may understand the proofs that the Bible is a revelation from God, and that the Bible writers were inspired, without being able to understand the methods

of revelation and inspiration. To say, "I will not believe in divine revelation or inspiration until you demonstrate its process," were just as reasonable as to say, "I will not believe in the genius and literary works of Shakespeare and Milton until you demonstrate how genius is bestowed, and how thoughts and words are inspired."

Turning away, therefore, from all formulated theories, we inquire simply into the evidences for the fact. What evidences are there to prove that the Bible is a supernatural revelation of God, and that its writers were inspired to record it?

And here questions open out to us that demand treatises and would fill volumes. I can only suggest general considerations. The collection of writings which we call the Bible has a history as a book, involving questions of authorship, of chronology, the formation of the canon, first of the Old, then of the New Testament. These, of course, I cannot touch. Theological science is the most voluminous science in the world. Biblical science has, perhaps, the largest literature. Some of the greatest minds of Europe have spent the chief years of their lives in examining the literary history of the different books making up the Bible. I will make only two remarks. First, that, as the result, speaking generally, the evidence that establishes the genuineness of the books of the Bible is far more conclusive than that which establishes the genuineness of Homer, or Herodotus, or any other ancient writer. Many of the books of Scripture are anonymous. This does not affect their claim to be a revelation of God, as attested by their characteristics, whoever may be proved or presumed to be their author.

The other remark is, that the revelation of God in

the Bible does not depend upon the proof that every book that makes up the Bible has been rightly admitted into the canon. Suppose it proved that Solomon's Song, or the Book of Esther, or the Book of Jonah, has been wrongly admitted into the canon, it only proves the misjudgment of the compilers with respect to them. You have still the great bulk of the Scriptures to account for.

The collection of books which we call the Bible has certain internal characteristics which must be considered and judged in determining its claim to be a supernatural revelation of God. And, let me say, the true method of judging a claim is to go first to its principal proofs, to begin not with its minor but with its main features. If the question be whether Christ wrought miracles, men will quibble at the lesser miracles of healing, and suggest that the effect was wrought by mesmerism, while they shut their eyes to the crucial miracle of His resurrection. Determine the chief miracle, the lesser miracles are easily dealt with. So in judging the supernatural claims of the Bible. Take first its main principles and positions; when these are settled, its minor difficulties of scientific, or historical, or numerical inaccuracy can be dealt with. Settle what is essential in the book, and what is circumstantial will easily be adjusted to it.

In looking at the Bible, two classes of phenomena strike attention. First, the supernatural element has to be recognised and accounted for. The sacred writers claim to "speak in the name of the Lord," and to be "filled with His Spirit." This they demonstrate by their superhuman knowledge, their superhuman wisdom, their superhuman acts. The claim and the record are so far in perfect accordance.

Moses claims to speak God's message to Pharaoh and to Israel. He supports his claim by a series of stupendous miracles. The prophets claim to speak God's message ; they support their claim by a series of predictions which critical ingenuity utterly fails to explain away. Men, no doubt, have claimed for some passages that they are predictions, when the proof is not conclusive ; but when these are eliminated there remain the most unquestionable and stupendous predictions ; the idea of the Messiah, for instance, first promised in the Book of Genesis, typically prophesied in the entire religious institutions of the Jewish people, distinctly foretold by the Jewish prophets, cherished through long centuries as the inspiring hope of the Jewish people, and then marvellously fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Is it possible to attribute to romance or to accident, a predictive and preparatory history, which extends through thousands of years, and has, in part of it, a nation for its subject—a wondrous harmony of continuous revelation, carried on by a great variety of declarations and types ?

If men claim to reveal the character and purposes of God, their teachings must be lofty, pure, and spiritual, so as to be in harmony with their claim. Who ventures to deny the moral and spiritual transcendency of the Bible ? However men may question its history and its miracles, they cannot dispute its religious goodness, relative to the ideas of the times when its tracts were written. For the Bible, be it remembered, is not a didactic teaching of theology ; it is a historical record of God's gradual revelation, as men were able to bear it. The revelation in Genesis is not so full and glorious as in the Gospel of John. The world had to be educated in divine ideas, and successive revelations

gradually educated them. The earlier revelations were less, and the more uncultured spiritual sense of semi-barbarous men more grossly perverted them.

Take the conception of God in the Book of Genesis ; elementary and partial, but in amazing contrast of righteousness and purity with all the deities that men had conceived. And the idea of God never changes ; it develops more and more, through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, until the glory of His Fatherhood is revealed in Christ.

The human characters of the Book of Genesis—Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham—never pass into demigods or heroes. In frequent intercourse with Jehovah, we always see them proper men. The lofty and unfaltering morality of the Book of Genesis is never compromised ; it is not the holiness of a John or a Paul, but even in Abraham it is a glorious nobility. Even in such a complex character as Jacob, the distinction between right and wrong is never for a moment left doubtful. A morality is presented ever growing in purity and spirituality until Christ came ; in wonderful contrast with that of Plato a thousand years later ; identical in its principles if not in its degree with the morality of this nineteenth Christian century.

And all this is blended, as in the Book of Genesis, with a pervading supernaturalism, recorded with inimitable simplicity and naturalness ; presumably by Moses—a writer of calm intellectual greatness, of almost unparalleled sagacity, of unmistakable moral goodness ; one of the sublimest intellects, one of the saintliest men that the world has seen. So that, if the history be a fable, it is blended with the sublimest spiritual ideas, the loftiest moral truth ; and is written by a man whom it is impossible, with any regard to intellectual or moral

congruities, to regard either as a fool who is deceived or a knave who deceives.

And the Book of Genesis is the first of a long series of tracts, produced during thirteen centuries, and in varying forms of literature—historical, legislative, poetical, theological, ethical—written by some five-and-twenty different persons, all of whom are in wonderful moral and theological harmony with each other. Each casual in its origin, distinctive in its form, complete in itself, and impressed with the strong individuality of its author; and yet all constituting one developing and orderly revelation of God to man, growing with the world's growth and widening with its enlarging experience; full of deep theological and spiritual harmonies; each workman preparing his contribution apart, but the whole brought together by the great Architect, and combined into one august and symmetrical temple of God. This is what we mean by the divine element of the Bible, this is its true miracle—a miracle not of outward uniformity, but of inward unity, culminating in the transcendent spiritual glory of the religion of Jesus Christ. "There are diversities of operation, but it is the same God who worketh all and in all."

A still more striking illustration is the Gospel record of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever the resemblances of the four Gospels, they are as remarkable in their diversities. And whatever the contrast between the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistles of Paul, the profoundest harmony of theological idea pervades them all. If there be any psychological characteristics of a writer, or any historical criteria of a narrative that can be relied upon, it is impossible to doubt the perfect honesty and trustworthiness of the four Evangelists, or the moral sincerity and earnestness of Paul. They cannot be

discredited without the utmost moral scepticism, without outraging all the probabilities that constitute moral certainty, and sacrificing all sober judgment to an insane credulity.

For the alternative is this: either these men are truthful witnesses, or they are the most audacious of the world's impostors. Combinations of ignorance and fanaticism may be supposed; but beyond certain limits—which are transgressed here—the result is a monstrosity of imagination, not a possibility of experience.

And yet the four narratives of these men contain the loftiest ideas of God, and the sublimest and most spiritual conceptions of holiness ever presented to the world. Their imposture or delusion is wrought in the holiest religious atmosphere, and in the calmest, most judicial temper.

Above all, they combine to give us the peerless, perfect character of Jesus Christ. Whence came this wonderful image presented thus in fourfold portraiture? For a single human imagination to create such a conception as the character of Jesus Christ, were, as Rousseau said, a greater miracle than He was. The creator must be greater than his production; but here are four such geniuses! Or how is Jesus Himself to be accounted for—a peasant of Judea, inspired with such divine ideas, and possessing such an imperial intellect, and having the marvellous power of inspiring four other peasants to write such a history of Him; so that through nineteen centuries of Christian belief and literature, no religious genius has ever produced a fifth Gospel, or an additional apostolical Epistle? These men, being Jews, set forth the most spiritual religion that the world has seen. Pushing aside all circumstantialia of their Judaism, by an unerring intuition they lay hold upon

the spiritual, the catholic, the eternal—a religion for every man upon the face of the earth; the profoundest philosophy of moral responsibility, of sin, of forgiveness, of holiness, of immortality that the world possesses. Indeed the proofs of the divine element in the Bible are almost inexhaustible. Almost every week some unsuspected but harmonious line of proof is opened out to us, proclaiming the divine.

I cannot dwell upon the second great characteristic element of the Bible, namely, the marks and proofs of its human authorship. Who can read any book of Scripture and not feel that a genuine human heart beats in it; that these are proper men—God-inspired, but yet retaining the full exercise of every human faculty and feeling, and expressing in their writings all their varied human personality, circumstances, and moods?

Wherever we open the Bible—at the sorrows of Job, the mission of Moses, the penitence of David, the labours of Paul—it is intensely, tenderly human, full of the thoughts and feelings and struggles of men of like passions with ourselves.

Else were the Bible unspeakably less precious to us. It were as great a relative loss to eliminate the human element from the Christ as the human element from the Bible. Its sacred writers are no mere bearers of despatches from the Court of Heaven; they are God-inspired, God-filled men; their human intellect and soul alike employed in the authorship of Scripture. "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

I cannot resolve the humanity of the sacred writers into passive instruments of the divine. I cannot think all the pious passion of David, all the personal avowals

of Paul unreal ; I cannot reduce them to the mock personages of a sacred drama, and the inspiring Spirit to the simulator of human voices and feelings. Only by fully and fearlessly recognising the human element in the authorship of Scripture can we even understand it.

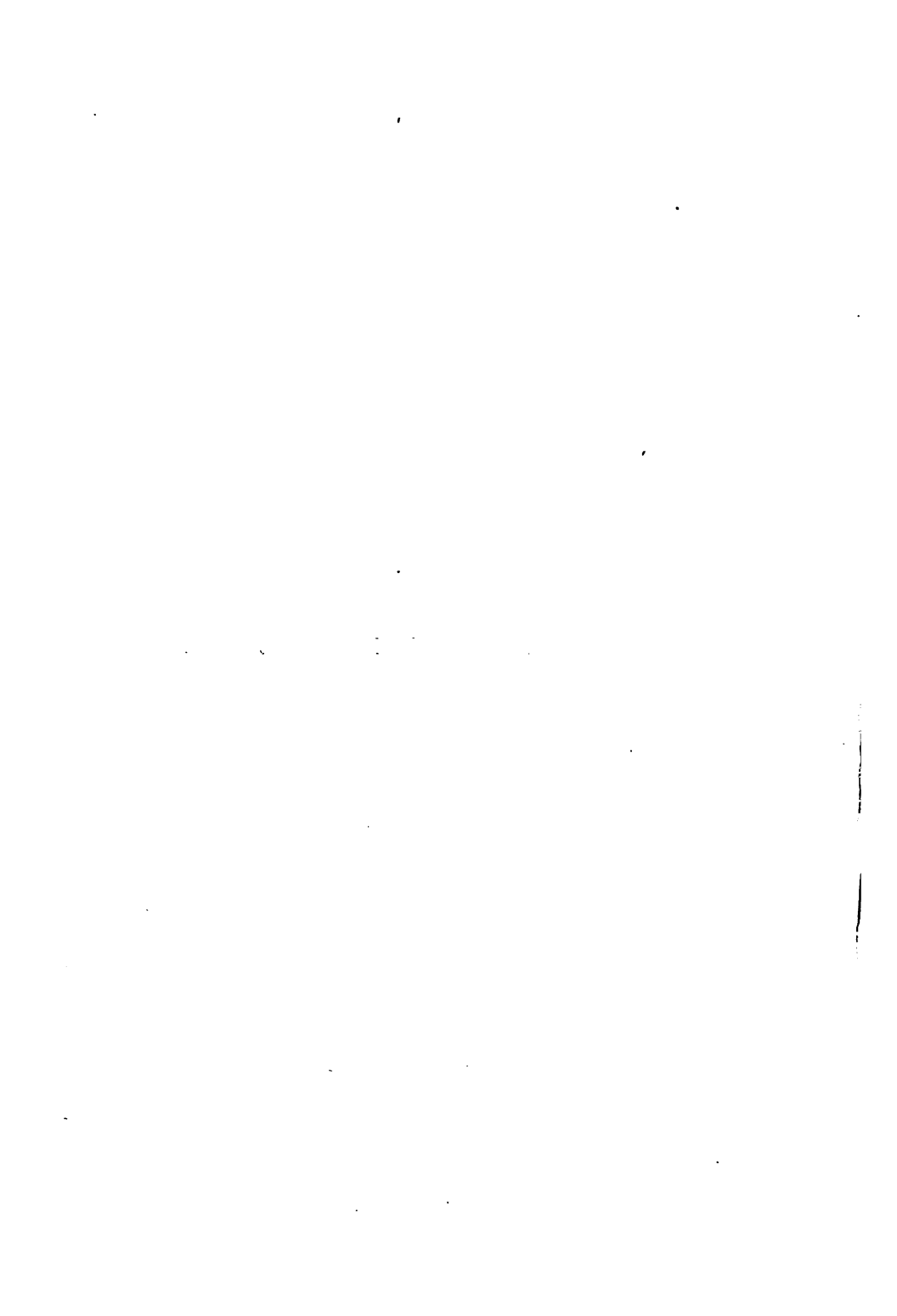
On these two demonstrated elements of Biblical authorship we rest. I attempt no scientific harmony of them—no theory that may be reduced to a dogma—any more than I do in the incarnation of the Christ. What are we that we should prescribe conditions for the manifest incarnation of the Divine Spirit in human agents ? May we not calmly rest here ? Do not these proven facts enthrone the Bible in our highest esteem and reverence ?

Of the supreme revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, it is not my present business to speak ; only of the transcendent excellences of the Bible as a written revelation of God. Abate all that you will for the imperfections of its human writers, for the idolatry of enthusiasm, or for the unintelligent reverence of mere tradition. In its unexaggerated greatness how unique and transcendent is this book ! In whatever light you view it, it is the greatest marvel of the world. It lies in its mute and mysterious character before us ; wondrous in its origin—a book from God in a sense in which no other book is ; the depository of His thoughts and purposes ; multiform in its authorship—a religious chronicle of nearly two thousand years. A book of life, coming forth from the little region of Palestine, the production of its shepherds and fishermen, it has taken hold of the world as no other book has ; asserted its sway over peasant and philosopher alike. The wisest confess the transcendency of its wisdom, the holiest the unapproachableness of its purity. It hallows the

palace of the rich and ennobles the hovels of the poor. Our legislators make laws by it, and obedience to them is secured by its influence. It refines our literature and imbues our common talk. Our greatest institutions are built upon it. It creates our noblest thoughts; it inspires our greatest lives; it teaches the most ignorant, and is a solace to the most sorrowful. It is the greatest strength of our lives; the one blessed hope in which we die. Other books have their changes; other truths their power and decay; but "the word of the Lord endureth for ever."



CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO THE FUTURE LIFE.



CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO THE FUTURE LIFE.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—JOHN XIV. 1—3.

THESE last hours and benedictions of our Lord upon earth almost transcend the comment of words. He calls it His glorification. In all spiritual estimates the passion and cross of Christ are His supreme glory. So the great sayings of this memorable night transcend all His other teachings, in their profoundness, spirituality, and glory. No such words were ever spoken, no such circumstances ever realized. Only one such night, one such teaching, one such event are recorded in human history.

All of spiritual truth that could be spoken to men, all of the spiritual world that could be revealed, all of the Father, of spiritual life in Him, of the Father's house and its blessedness that could be taught, are gathered into these hours of tenderest feeling and utmost confidence. The words are laden with the greatest meanings, intense with the deepest emotion; they seem spoken from Heaven rather than upon earth. They are the last words of the greatest life ever lived, of the divinest teachings ever spoken; and they are addressed to the profoundest mysteries and sorrows of human life. No

marvel that we turn to them so instinctively when the shadow of death falls upon us.

Our Lord is about to be put to death, to leave the disciples who had learned to reverence and love Him so much ; and "sorrow had filled their hearts." These are His consolations for human bereavement. We have none higher or other. How does He comfort them ? Not by commonplace ethics or moralisings, but by drawing aside the veil that conceals the spiritual world, and revealing to them entirely new conceptions concerning the Father Himself, the future life, and their own relations to it. He, their Lord, is the Lord of life, and He will prepare for them a place in the glorious world which He Himself is about to enter. He does not so much teach truths as He reveals facts about the future life. He "brings life and immortality to light." He is to depart, they are to remain. More remains concealed than even He can reveal to them. They can only trust Him, their loving Lord, and wait for the heavenly life of which He assures them. His chief urgency is that they should implicitly trust in Him—trust Him even as they trusted God Himself : "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

The demand is startling and significant. What does it mean ? To say the least, He claims to have brought some addition to their religious ideas, to the rest and hope of their faith, to their knowledge and assurance of the life to come—something that they did not before possess. To their former belief in God they were now to add a like belief in Him ; and this would establish their faith in the future life of which He speaks. It were a very meagre and inadequate explanation of this to render it, "I, a mere human prophet of God, bring you an additional teaching." The reference is too singularly

personal; it is not the manner of any other prophet. Moses on Sinai makes no reference to himself, but simply to the divine message which he bore. But this meek and lowly prophet of Nazareth, farther removed from personal assumption than any man who ever lived, audaciously places His personality beside that of God Himself, and makes His teaching of the future life turn almost entirely upon what He Himself was and had done. The addition which He makes to our knowledge of the future is to tell us more about Himself. To comfort us in bereavement we are to feel towards Him as we feel towards God Himself. He is about to enter upon His heavenly glory. Not only will He be to them all that God has been, but, as the glorified Mediator, they will find in Him comfort of a distinctive and surpassing kind.

Well, this is only in harmony with the great idea of the incarnate Christ. He, so to speak, personifies the Deity, brings Him near to us, enables us to realize Him, creates special sympathies and confidences, bridges over the great distance between God and man. We could not approach God from the human side, God approaches man from the divine side—takes human nature upon Himself. In this way we are made to realize the nearness, the tenderness, the humanity of the Divine Father; and the brotherhood of Him who became really a man—the partaker of our human experiences, “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” It is not the spiritual God speaking to us in divine condescension and pity, it is our fellow-man speaking to us in human brotherhood and sympathy.

This is the new idea, the new revelation of divine relationship that Christ would have His disciples realize. It would inspire them with a greater religious trust and

comfort. When, in the confession of Peter, the disciples attained to the recognition of Him as "the Christ the Son of the living God," we have the singular record—"From that time forth began Jesus to show to His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." So here, if they could but realize that He was the Lord of immortal life, they would be comforted in His crucifixion. It is a strange teaching—to be understood at all only upon the supposition that He was indeed the incarnate Son of God. Human nearness and sympathy are added to divine power and pity.

One does not wonder that the disciples were troubled when told that their Master was about to die. There is no anguish so sharp and desolating as that which bereavement causes. He who had been to them infinitely more than friend or brother, whom they had loved with a love having all the reverence of worship and all the intensity of passion, whose life had been their ideal of goodness, whose love had been their blessedness, whose divine teaching and working had been their glory—He was about to be taken from them; they are to be bereaved of more than affection ever lost before. Never had sorrow so great an occasion. The grief of bereavement is measured by the greatness of possession. Only those who had known Him could know what it was to lose the man Christ Jesus. Therefore "sorrow had filled their hearts," the depth of which was attested alike by the vehemence of Peter and the tenderness of John.

His comfort for them was, trust in Him as the immortal Christ, who would "go to prepare a place for them, and come again to receive them to Himself."

From all of us beloved friends are taken, upon whom all the wealth of our love has been lavished, all its force exhausted; and we carry from our darkened home those who will "return no more"—husband or parent, wife or child. Henceforth there will be a foot silent upon the floor, a place vacant by our side.

Is there any comfort for human thought or heart comparable to the comfort of the risen Christ? As a simple fact of human experience, does anything assuage the bitterness of bereavement, or illumine its darkness, as trust in Christ does?

Who feels comforted when philosophy bids us suppress our sorrow because it is useless, teaching our hearts to love to-day and forbidding our love to lament to-morrow? when it moralizes about "the common lot," and about the rest of the grave? "Why weep for the dead whom weeping cannot restore?" "Even so," we reply, "therefore we weep." Could affection be more cynically mocked?

Who feels comforted by teachings of a general theism—the unerring wisdom, the unfailing goodness which ordains all things? Some comfort it has, but how meagre compared with the comfort of the personal, loving Christ—when to this faith in God I can add faith in Him "who loved me and gave Himself for me," "who died and rose again"; when I stand in the full light of the life and immortality that He has revealed; "begotten again to this living hope by His resurrection from the dead!" He Himself, living a proper man in this mortal world—weeping by open graves, commending His parting spirit to His Father, and sleeping in the awful silence of the sepulchre; then bursting its bars, because "it was not possible for Him to be holden of death"; then ascending to heaven a glorified man—

His body a resurrection body, "the first fruits of them that slept"; like to which glorious body our bodies are to be made, raised from the dead as His was raised, made spiritual bodies as His was a spiritual body.

Is there not strong consolation in this? It is an instance as well as a proof; therefore it appeals very differently to our feelings. It may not be more certain than the promise of "Him who cannot lie" would have been, but it seems and feels more.

When I realize the rapid course of my life, when I search the darkness and interrogate the silence beyond the grave, when I think of those taken from me, whose bodies I have seen inanimate, unconscious of every appeal, remembrance, and affection, put into the cold, oblivious grave, it does comfort me to think of the sepulchre in the garden where they laid Him, of the morning of the first day of the week, of the angels who said, "He is not here, He is risen," of the Mount of Olives where "a cloud received Him out of their sight," and of the Apocalyptic vision, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." I am comforted not by promise merely, but by fact and earnest. Death is conquered. "This corruptible must put on incorruption; this mortal must put on immortality." "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

In this way then—in His own instance and achievement—Christ gives precision, and certainty, and illumination, to the great human yearning for immortality.

The instincts and hopes of a future life, so indestructible in our nature, receive a strong confirmation. "A door is opened in heaven." We have revealed to us more than man had ever dreamed—"things impos-

sible to utter." The dim tokens, the faint instincts of the life to come, are developed into luminous forms. The forecastings and peradventures, which earthly conditions and passions had darkened and chequered, become certainties. Prophecies are read in the light of history. Our strongest yearnings, our highest hopes receive an absolute assurance. "Life and immortality are brought to light."

"If it were not so I would have told you." It is a parenthesis of singular significance and emphasis, full of human considerateness and tenderness. It is a measure of the greatness of the revelation which He was making to them. He would not trifle with this great human hope of immortality. Had there been no such satisfaction for it He would have told them. It was impossible for Him to deceive them with a false or uncertain hope, or to permit them to be deceived. He came to teach them about spiritual realities, and this was one of them.

It is a simple parenthesis in the midst of one of His greatest teachings, but it seems more than the most elaborate argument. He is speaking about the future life as the hope and consolation of those whom death bereaves, and He affirms concerning it some very definite things—things which are a clear addition to human knowledge about it. And the manner of His affirmation is as remarkable as its matter. He calmly assumes His own certain knowledge about it. He is not an enquirer about the unseen world. He does not, like Plato, rest His teachings upon reasonings and probabilities. He speaks with absolute certainty. Clearly He believed Himself to have certain knowledge.

His assertion must be judged in the light of His transcendent intellectual character and His unimpeachable

truth and holiness, as well as in that of His entire teaching. Is it conceivable that a supreme intellect like His could be deceived? Is it possible that perfect moral goodness like His could have deceived others? Is it conceivable that calm and measured self-control such as all His teachings evince could, on this particular, have used exaggerated language; that He could have said He knew when He only speculated, or guessed, or inferred? //

→ (If any testimony concerning the future life is credible, it is surely the absolute affirmation of Jesus Christ. //

It is significant, too, that He appeals so confidently to their convictions of His truthfulness. He assumes that they will implicitly believe Him. He not only implies His own innate truthfulness, He appeals to their conviction of it. They being judges, it was impossible for Him to deceive them; or, by His silence, to permit them to be deceived. What a wonderful impression the character and teaching of this prophet of Nazareth must have made! They knew Him to be "the truth."

We might, I think, apply this to the nature which God has given us, and get a strong argument from it. If the great hope and yearning for immortality in human hearts were false, if the instinct of men all the world over were delusions, why has the Creator so made us as that our nature should universally imagine a falsehood and tend to it?

I cannot think that God has made my nature to testify a lie. I cannot think that the instincts of my soul can be false, any more than the affinities of my body. Every great spiritual yearning of human souls—my yearning for God, my yearning for holiness, my yearning for immortality—is a true yearning, and has its answering satisfaction somewhere.

"If it were not so I would have told you." Good-

ness as well as truth would have demanded this. A tender nature like that of Christ's could not have permitted such hopes to gather only to be disappointed; could not have intensified the thirst for immortality, knowing that there was nothing to quench it. Then were we "of all men most miserable." If, indeed, Christ's teachings about the future life be not true, our entire conception of Him and of His relations to us must be sacrificed. "He deceiveth the people." His methods are illicit. He claims our services on false pretences. He appeals to our grateful affections on the ground of blessings which He cannot confer. He promises rewards and a fellowship which are mere imaginations. His own resurrection is a fraud, and its lessons are illusions. He leaves us the victims of the hugest, the most cruel delusion ever practised upon human souls. "If it were not so I would have told you." The entire character and work of Jesus Christ are pledged to the truth of His teachings about the future life. || ←

What, then, does He tell us?

First, that Heaven is the "Father's house"—a house of "many mansions"; a condition of family life and fellowship, not an aching splendour, a painful publicity, a crowded ceremonial. All that is most tender and sacred in the fellowship and relationships of home will be realized in it—its privacy and individuality, as well as its communion. Its grandeur will not oppress us, its services will not awe us. The feeling of the child in his Father's house will overpower all other feelings—the recognition of Him, the sense of His love, the joy of His fellowship; "His Father and our Father." It suggests all the tender yearning and love and rest of home, only purified, intensified, and perfected. Our first home the type of the last!

And lest the suggestion of home should selfishly narrow our thought, He tells us that in the Father's house are "many mansions." How exclusive we often are! "Lord, are there few that be saved?" How many more will be found there than even the largest-hearted would imagine! "The nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it." "A multitude that no man can number, of every nation, and kindred, and tongue."

Death is not a breaking up of the fellowships of life. When we die we begin truly to live. A higher life, a vaster fellowship of life, new gates of life, open to us: men of all Churches, and of no Church are there; men who never heard of Christ waking to His redemption; men who wrongly conceived of Christ "seeing Him as He is."

"Many mansions." Not then a vast multitude in an open space—worshippers in a crowded temple. "A multitude that no man can number," but in "many mansions"—a vast house of many rooms in which are private fellowships as well as public services.

Not a monotonous uniformity, even of goodness; but a world of infinite variety, where different types of character, of sympathy, of pursuit have fullest development. Can we conceive of character in Heaven as less individualized than here? Will not all relationships of life, all forms and preferences of pure affection, all varieties of pursuit be perfected there? Each in his own place and of his own company; different degrees of holiness and intelligence; a divine harmony rather than a uniformity. "One star differeth from another star in glory." "Diversities of operation, but one Spirit."

And yet a perfect unity, as of a family. "Many mansions," but one Father's house—all gathering

round the great hearth of God. Many children, but one family—"they shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." A home of perfect security, that can know no intrusion of evil, no touch of change, "they go out no more for ever," "eternal in the Heavens."

"I go to prepare a place for you." "When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers." It is not enough that the Father's house is spacious; access to it must be made possible; the blessings of it must be made congruous. How the assurance rings: "Because I live, ye shall live also"! "Where I am, there shall My servant be"; "Whither the forerunner has for us entered."

Does not His human presence in it make Heaven the Father's house that He designates it? Should we not be conscious of strangeness, hesitancy, shrinking, in leaving this realized and familiar life for the unknown and strange experiences even of Heaven? Would not our foot falter and our heart fail even at its threshold, were it not that He "the forerunner has for us entered"?

Is not this the thought pointed at in the assurance, "Where I am, there shall My servant be also"? Not as Mediator only, but as human brother does He enter it, preparing its human welcome and fellowship. To be there is to "be with Christ, which is far better." The great reason of His incarnation rules also the heavenly fellowship.

And when the place is prepared, He Himself will "come and receive us to Himself." His coming, His presence constitute Heaven—all that He needs to say about it.

What a conception of dying this gives us! Death is only Christ's coming. Whatever the physical change,

this is the spiritual consummation ; " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." What a teaching of Heaven it is ! Not only a new certainty, but a new conception. The glorified Christ makes Heaven the Father's house that He designates it, the home of the redeemed children.

We know but little of the conceptions of Heaven that the patriarchs and the Jewish saints had. But assuredly they fell far short of this—a Heaven without the human Christ ; the same in general idea, but very different in special feeling ; less of a Father's house, less of a children's home ; appealing less to human sentiments and experiences.

Our Christian Heaven is far more than " Abraham's bosom," far more than a beauteous paradise, far more than even " God's presence." It is the home of the man Christ Jesus, the human child as well as the Divine Son of the Heavenly Father. " I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God."

Thus every Christian conception of Heaven, every New Testament presentation of it, every believing hope of it is connected with Him. Our dead are the " dead in Christ " ; they " sleep in Jesus," they are " with Him in paradise," " with Christ, which is far better," " present with the Lord."

It is a sufficient representation and promise : " The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them to living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

And it is enough to comfort us concerning our dead. We seem to know what they are when we are thus told where they are. They are " like Him, for they see Him as He is." " A little while and ye shall not see Me, and again a little while and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father."

THE PASSION FOR GOD.

THE PASSION FOR GOD.

“My soul followeth hard after Thee.”—PSALM LXIII. 8.

IT is the very heart of religion that throbs in these Psalms. Sometimes the heart of joy, and there is no rapture so great as religious rapture. Sometimes the heart of sorrow, and no anguish is so keen as spiritual anguish. Sometimes it is the quiet feeling of ordinary life, then it is the truest, purest, and most tender of all human sentiments.

Hence these Psalms are taken into the inmost soul of devout men. They are instinct with religious passion—the passion for God. They come out of great fervid religious experiences, and therefore they proffer sympathy for all our moods of feeling, and furnish words for their expression; they have ever been the liturgy of the most religious souls.

We hear saintly men speaking to God—rejoicing in praise, pleading in prayer, or pouring forth their deepest feelings towards God. And with this peculiarity, that, speaking to God in devotional confidence, they embody those inmost and most delicate religious feelings which could not without painful exposure be directly expressed. I could not stand up in a congregation, and in my own proper person utter directly to God all the hopes and fears of my soul. But when a psalm or a hymn embodies these emotions in forms of passion, or tenderness, or beauty, I can adopt its words, and with-

out violation of delicate reserve, speak to God out of the very depths of my soul. It is an open secret, only God knows the meanings that I embody; they are common words upon a thousand lips, but their confidence is as sacred as the words of my own closet.

So David utters his very heart to God—his eager passionate cry after God, his pathetic moan because he has lost the sense of God, his entreaty for the restoration of suspended fellowship with God, his eager delight in God, the ardour of his endeavours to realise God. No man in the common daylight of life could unbare the workings of such emotions. And yet, in human hearts, such feelings do work so often and so strongly, that if we had no expression for them in public worship, public worship would be if not a hypocrisy, yet a mockery of our deepest emotions and strongest desires. It is not chiefly the intellect troubled about theological problems, and seeking enlightenment; it is not the imagination desiring a richer ritual; it is not the emotional nature craving a deeper sentiment; it is the spiritual life craving a more vivid sense of God, a closer sympathy, a larger communion, a more entire sanctity.

And this is the very heart of religion; whatever the medium through which God is realised—the theological understanding or the practical service of God—the realisation of God in the soul itself is alone religious life. For this therefore, whatever the means and conditions of it, the religious man craves. If it be troubled or suspended he will cry out in alarm and agony; if it be imperfectly realised he will "follow hard after God."

Religious men of all ages and Churches find their true unity in this. God has fashioned all our hearts alike, and the common spiritual life of religious men lies far deeper than distinctive theological teachings, than distinctive

forms of religious worship or of Church organization—just as human nature is more radical than nationalities or households.

These Psalms were written in the theological childhood of the world, when men's notions even of God Himself were very imperfect. Yet how true and fervent their spiritual life, their religious affection and desire! How they throw off mere ritual and circumstance! How passionately they crave simple communion with God Himself, religious sanctity, spiritual life and joy! The Psalms would be very defective as exponents of dogmatic theology, they fall very far short even of Christian ethics; they have but little dogma, or ritual, or prescription; but they are intense with spiritual feeling; impulsive, free as life, they ebb and flow, rejoice and weep, range over the whole varied experience of human life, and therefore they suffice.

God has not thought it needful to provide for us a Christian Psalter. It is the common religious heart that in these psalms speaks the love, the faith, the sorrow, the desire, the hope, of the soul, as it lives its life before God. And through common experiences our sympathies are most deeply touched. We never think of asking the creed, or the baptism, or the ritual of the man. We simply feel the religious heart of thirty centuries ago beating in wonderful sympathy with our own. We can find no fuller, no more fitting expressions for our religious moods.

Of course the men who composed these Psalms were men of exceptional spiritual experience—rich, deep, and passionate; else their lyrics would not so have lived through three thousand years, nor taken such possession of Christian hearts. Many men, sincerely religious, are incapable of great passions, they are essentially

shallow, tepid, self-controlled, commonplace. The men who have moulded the Church and made its history were men of great passionate natures—Moses, David, Elijah, Peter, Paul, Augustine, Luther—men who fought great battles, formed grand purposes, did heroic things. Only such men could have written these Psalms, only such men fully understand them. Prudent, tepid natures ask whether their passion is not exaggerated. They are amazed at such a wail, they extenuate such raptures. If they venture to use their fervid words, it is with a misgiving that carefully limits them, a heart that almost freezes them. These may go beyond the experiences of some men; they fall short of none. All other hearts are enfolded in this great religious heart; all other experiences in this dramatic and passionate experience. So the worship of the congregation becomes a living, fervent thing. All hearts speak to God through one great heart, and either realise its experiences or yearn towards them. And thus the aggregate of a thousand individual experiences goes up to God.

“My soul followeth hard after Thee.”

Why should a man have such an eager, passionate feeling about God—the invisible, the spiritual, the imperfectly known God? Is it not one of the most mysterious instincts of human creatures? And yet is there any other mark, any other characteristic of our nature so strong, so indestructible as this? However this mysterious nature of mine came to be what it is, whether it was developed from a protoplasm, an Ascidian mollusc, or an ape, as evolutionists tell us, or made after the image of God, the very breath of God's own life, as the Bible tells us, thus we find it; somehow it has come to be a spiritual, a moral thing, fundamentally different from mere matter, from brute life. It has moral feeling,

conscience, power and freedom of will, and the deep, ineradicable sense of God. Here man is, a moral creature radically different from brutes and pulpy matter, and wherever he is he yearns for God ; he has capacities and affections which only God can satisfy.

It is not enough to say that he is a moral being, that he has a sense of right and wrong towards other men. He is a religious being as well. Were he alone in the world these mysterious yearnings for God would be the same. They are strongest in the best men. There is in man a sense of religion as well as a sense of morality—of relations to God, of desire for God. The religious sense is as real, as vital, as irrepressible, as the moral, the intellectual, or the animal sense. Only the spiritual God can satisfy a spiritual nature ; only the spiritual inspirations of an infinite being. For, unlike the material, there are no bounds to the spiritual. It is ever craving more ; every attainment is but a qualification and an incitement for something greater. Augustine's great saying is profoundly true : " O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we cannot rest until we rest in Thee." Our spiritual nature cannot find its satisfactions in itself. Just as the body demands food, just as the intellect demands knowledge, so the soul demands spiritual nutriment. The faculty, the capacity is there, and only God can fill it. It " cries out for the living God."

Men may not recognise the God they need ; it may be only a dumb, vague, ignorant, unrestrained craving, but the craving is there. It ails it knows not what. Men may shrink from the holy spiritual God declared to them, but still they crave ; they can find no other. It is only when the religious heart is quickened, regenerated, brought into harmony of life, into vital sympathy

with God, that God becomes the object of conscious, definite desire.

Our nature is made for God. It has to learn to disbelieve. It needs a great deal of intellectual and moral tutoring before it can conclude that there is no God, or that we have nothing to do with Him. We are so made. Not more surely does the needle point to the north, or the flame seek the sun, than we seek God. All pagan religions are ignorant impulses and seekings after God. Even in men who have schooled themselves into the denial of God, the sense of God will assert itself, often suddenly and unexpectedly, with such strength that, in a great agony, the prayerless rejector of God will incontinently cry out for the living God. A man's character is determined by the way in which he nurtures or suppresses the great instincts of his nature.

The sense of God may be cultured—nurtured until it becomes a passion. Every instinct, every affection, can be cultured into strength or mortified into feebleness. A man may cherish the sentiment of God, the feeling of religious relation to God, by reverent respect, by fidelity to his religious nature and yearnings, by religious thought, and reading, and prayer, by meditating on the great revelations of God—supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has revealed God as the loving Father—by practical obedience and ready service, until the feeling of God comes to possess him, just as any other passion, indulged and cultivated, may do. Every passion becomes absorbing and masterful if thus ministered to. The religious man nurtures religious sentiment, as the artist or the poet, the philosopher or the business man, nurtures his distinctive faculty—does everything in his power to strengthen and perfect it.

Such culture of piety is the responsibility of the religious life. We "keep ourselves in the love of God," nurture our affections for God and Christ, encourage them and minister to them, until they become the master-passion of life, the inspiration and rule of all that we do.

The Psalmist gives expression to fervent religious passion. Think of Matthew Arnold defining all this as "a tendency not our own making for righteousness." If ever a strong personal passion found expression, it is in David's recognition of God. He had gone far beyond the mere vague feeling of righteousness; the mere sense of duty, of self-interest; the mere doing of religious things; the mere reasonings of theology. We reach God by wings, not by climbing footsteps. Such an inspiration is not possible to mere theological science, to a mere sense of religious duty, or to religious calculation.

It is the religious heart drawn to God by ardent affections, God the object of intense personal love. For the intelligence and strength of the religious life there must be clear discernments, strong intellectual convictions, a deep sense of what is right. But a devout heart loves as well as knows. God, in His holiness and love, becomes the object of passion; and through love we know most. Other things may teach; love divines—it understands by its sympathies. David loved God as a man loves his fellows, only with infinitely more of inspiration and rapture. He sought communion with Him; was in despair when he lost the sense of His presence; found in it the supreme blessedness of his life. And in the saints of the New Testament to whom God was revealed in Christ—made more definite, personal, near, and loving, through the incarnation—we see the same religious passion: in the enthusiasm of Peter,

the fervour of Paul, the intensity of John. So we think of Bernard, Fénelon, Leighton, Baxter, Bunyan, and hundreds more, charged with religious passion, which yearns, and prays, and "cries out for the living God." It is the characteristic of the highest forms of religious life, and is its most blessed condition.

It is the true test of a religious life—not what truths we believe, what duties we perform, what worship we attend, but what fervours of affection we attain. A man whose sense of God is dull, whose desire for God is feeble, whose heart towards God is cold, is manifestly in low spiritual health, whatever his church-goings or bustling activities.

A worldly heart divided in its desires, palsied in its ardour, does not "follow hard after God." A corrupt heart, impure in its affections, will not "follow hard after God." A supine heart, indifferent and tepid in religious feeling, will not "follow hard after God." The measure of our desire for God is the measure of our religious life.

How practical and congruous the religious life of the Bible is! How harmonious in its methods and satisfactions with all other pursuits of human life! A theological doctrine! Yes; the loftiest and profoundest of all doctrines; but infinitely more than a mere doctrine. A religious sentiment! Yes! the most tender and subduing of all sentiments; but far more than a mere sentiment. A worship! Yes! the most elevating and inspiring of all worship; but far more than a mere worship. A morality! Yes! purer, more penetrating, radical, and spiritual, than all moralities; but far more than a morality. It is a supreme *life*, realised and nurtured only by earnest, practical ministries, only by culture and care for the great laws and necessities of

life. It is a practical striving. We "follow hard after God," with eager desire, with practical aptitudes, with strenuous endeavour.

It is the true economy of life—I work and God works in me; I live and Christ lives in me; I sow the seed and God giveth the increase; I minister the nurture and God quickens the mysterious powers of life. Without my ministry there could be no life—without God's quickening there could be no life. God will not—may we not reverently say that, in the harmony of His great laws, God cannot?—make strong and glad a supine, a passive soul. If I would greatly live in Him I must strive after every development of strong life—by works as well as by prayer; by exercises of faith and patience and self-denial, as well as by right religious sentiment. Save my soul. Yes, the most arduous experiences develop the noblest souls; the most strenuous climber attains to loftiest heights. What need of rules and rituals when the soul is full of strong passionate desire for God; when the instincts of fervent love prompt us in all that we do; when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; when the love of Christ constraineth us? He that loveth well will in all things live well, for "love is the fulfilling of all law."

30- The Great conception of human life & its possibility of becoming
Saddistic

31- man's greatest tragedy, need to God.